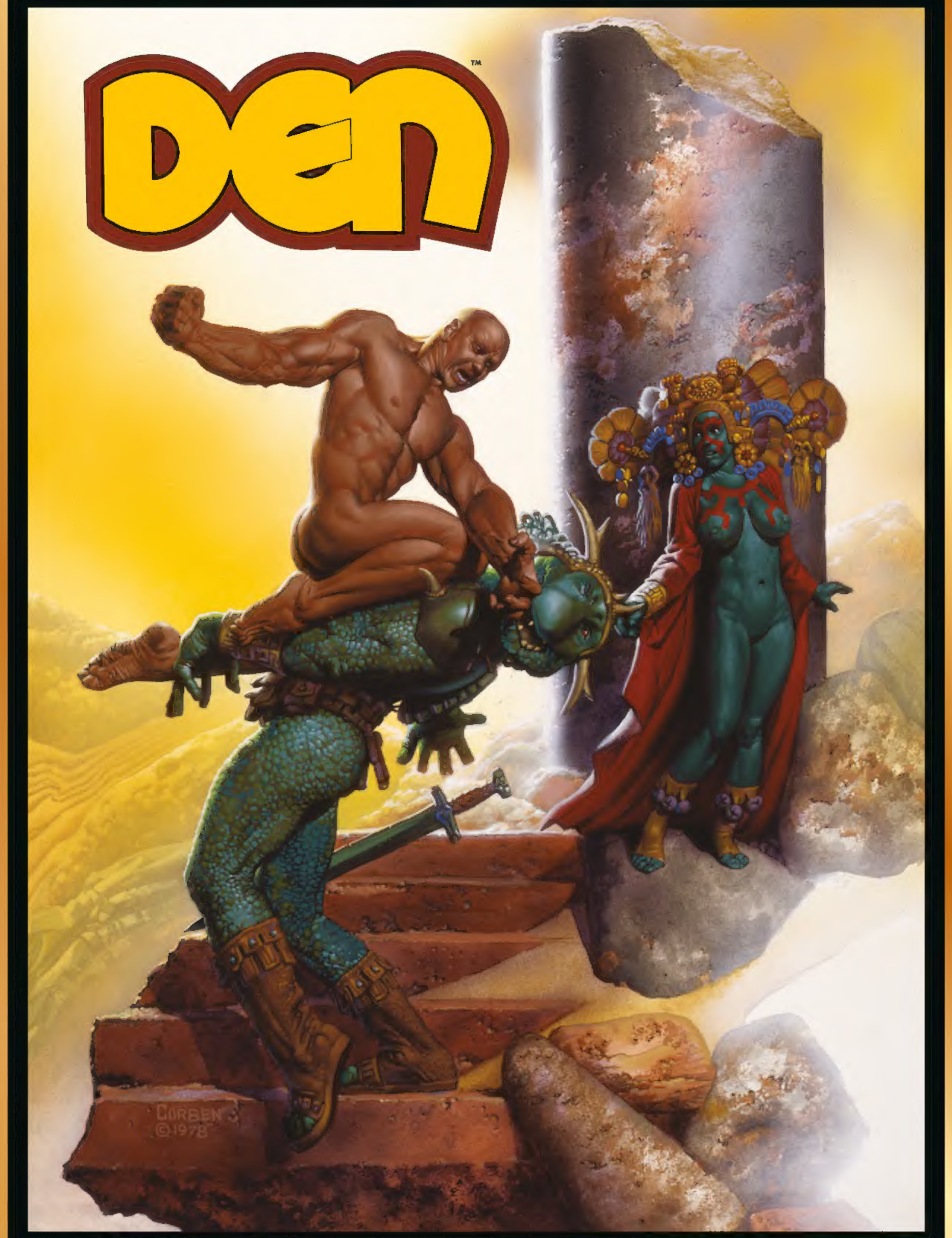

RICHARD CORBEN

RICHARD CORBEN

Heavy Metal Den Movie Poster Painting (Columbia, 1981)

DAD™

VOLUME 1

NEVERWHERE

RICHARD CORBEN
Art and Script

NATE PIEKOS OF BLAMBOT®
Letters

JOSÉ VILLARRUBIA
Project Art Director

DARK HORSE BOOKS

Mike Richardson
President & Publisher

Daniel Chabon
Editor

Chuck Howitt-Lease and Misha Gehr
Assistant Editors

Patrick Satterfield
Designer

Allyson Haller
Digital Art Technician

Special Thanks to
Dona Corben

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FOREWORD
THE METAMORPHOSIS OF *DEN*

JOSÉ VILLARRUBIA

The essence of Richard Corben's most personal and acclaimed creation, *Den*, is fundamentally one of transformation. When it first appeared in the 1960s, the idea that even a thin man could turn into a muscular Adonis had been etched in the public consciousness of American readers of pulp magazines and comics. It was exemplified in Charles Atlas's ubiquitous advertisements featuring the comic story "The Insult that Made a Man Out of 'Mac,'" which encouraged male readers' fantasies of how even "a 97-pound weakling" could become "a real man," beat up bullies, and get the girl of his dreams to pay attention to him finally.

This bodily transformation is the basic premise of *Den*. Corben grew up reading and loving comics about ideal heroes, including Captain Marvel, who in reality was Billy Batson, a disabled adolescent who could magically transform into a massive muscleman like Superman. Corben also read Edgar Rice Burroughs, and his John Carter of Mars novels were an essential source of inspiration for the *Den* story. Like Burroughs's character John Carter, Den travels to a mysterious planet populated by monsters and alluring nude princesses. Unlike Carter, who was already a heroic character on Earth, and like Billy Batson, Den transforms from a "Mac" into an enormously developed bodybuilder, the ultimate realization of Charles Atlas's dream.

The message of the Atlas advertisements was not an isolated instance. The 1950s had seen an explosion in the United States in the popularity of bodybuilding and, in particular, its marketing to teens. physique culture magazines taunted young readers with headlines like "Hey, Skinny! Are They Laughing at You?" The belief that "bigger is better" was eventually reflected in the movies, thanks to new stars with impressive physiques like champion bodybuilder Steve Reeves, who made fan-favorite Italian peplum films like *Hercules* (1958) and *Hercules Unchained* (1959). Also, in 1958, blonde sex symbol Jayne Mansfield married Mr. Universe Mickey Hargitay, and they became a perfect pinup couple. Den's characteristic shaved head may have been influenced by Yul Brynner, who showed off his fit build in highly successful movies like 1956's *The Ten Commandments*.

When the fad for superhero comics died in the early 1950s, the most famous illustrated muscled hero was Al Capp's Li'l Abner, the protagonist of his eponymous comic strip. Abner was a 6' 3", extremely muscular simpleton. His paramour Daisy Mae, modeled after movie stars of the day, exuded sensuality. The couple was famously married in 1952, and the event proved so popular that it was featured on the cover of *Life Magazine*. After all, the comic strip had sixty million readers and was published in over nine hundred American newspapers. In 1954, one of Corben's artistic influences, illustrator Frank Frazetta, started penciling the Sunday strip, enhancing the characters' sensuality. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that Frazetta, best known for his depictions of alluring fantasy females, later worked on the first fully painted comic, *Little Annie Fannie*, published in *Playboy Magazine* starting in 1962. It featured the adventures of a curvaceous ingénue and satirized topical themes of its day. The brainchild of cartoonist Harvey Kurtzman, the comic was meticulously painted by several artists and printed on slick paper within the pages of the erotic magazine. It was a sex farce with somewhat dated and often problematic humor, where Annie, an

archetypical "dumb blonde," generally ended up losing her clothes.

The *Den* series had elements of these films and comics: the titular hero was a "perfect" muscular specimen like Reeves and Hargitay in the movies but bald like Brynner. Like Abner, he was also naïve and innocent and had a very sexy and knowing blonde girlfriend. And the overt eroticism which permeated strips like *Little Annie Fannie* and many of the uncensored underground comix for which Corben had been working was essential to the story. Like Annie Fanny but reversing gender stereotypes, Den is an innocent who accidentally lost his clothes and ended up in compromising situations, becoming a sex object on several occasions. But, like Fanny, he always managed to get out of them.

A surprising aspect of the series directly inherited from the John Carter novels is that all the characters are nude. And in particular, a feature of the *Den* comics that had not been seen before was the presence of highly realistic and exaggerated full-frontal male nudity. The Comics Code Authority, formed in 1954, forbade any form of nudity and any reference to sexuality. Eventually, erotic comics like *Little Annie Fannie* bypassed the Code by being published in adult magazines. These generally depicted many female nudes but consistently shied away from showing males. From the early 1960s on, underground comix also bypassed the Code and often featured both male and female nudity, but generally were drawn very stylized by artists like Robert Crumb, S. Clay Wilson, and Vaughn Bodē. No other underground artist drew with the precision and realism of Corben. The uninhibited presence of believable and voluptuous bare characters of both genders is one of the defining thematic aspects of *Den* and one that sets it apart from other fantasy sagas. The series can be seen as a celebration of erotic freedom that reflected the zeitgeist of the "Free Love" era in which the comic was conceived.

Den made its debut in a 1968 short film created by Corben titled *Neverwhere*, which combined live action with simple hand-drawn animation. Five years later, Corben conceived a sequel in the underground comic *Grim Wit* (issue 2). After two years, he continued the story, now printed on larger slick paper, in the French comics anthology *Metal Hurlant* and then its American counterpart, *Heavy Metal*. The stylistic and tonal differences in the ever-evolving art produced by these time gaps are apparent in this, the first volume of the series. The two opening chapters (pages 9–24) are an extended version of the *Grim Wit* story, drawn in a slightly cartoony style similar to the animated short that could be easily reproduced in newsprint. The third one, from *Metal Hurlant* (pages 25–32), is shockingly different: Taking advantage of the now-excellent reproduction, Corben produced fully painted art with photographic backgrounds and colored it in the elaborate technique he had developed. Then he decided to fully paint the fourth one directly on the artboards (pages 33–40) in a method similar to *Little Annie Fannie*'s. But in the next chapter for *Heavy Metal* (pages 41–48), he reverted to fully rendered black and white art colored in hand-made separations, and he continued using this method until the end of this graphic novel. *Den* is a testament to Corben's art's evolution and constant experimentation. The energy of the phenomenal drawing and the dynamic storytelling in these diverse chapters propel the narrative regardless of which of his art techniques he used.

This edition reprints the entire first volume of the *Den* series, also titled *Neverwhere*, for the first time in thirty-eight years. Naturally, reproduction technology has significantly advanced since then, and all the original art has been scanned for this book. In addition, the often previously oversaturated plates have been carefully color corrected. The book is also newly lettered, uniting its once-chaotic design, and the panels, gutters, and word balloons have been cleaned up. This is the best presentation that has ever been done of this comics masterpiece and is a fitting homage to the fiftieth anniversary of its earliest publication.

José Villarrubia
Madrid, January 2023

INTRODUCTION

PATTON OSWALT

I mean, those *bodies*.

Kinetic, granite sculptures covered in sentient caramel. The human genome cranked to maximum attractiveness. Pneumatic amplitude bouncing and writhing across eldritch expanses of dread and loneliness.

Look, I know I should be talking about the series's clever nods to *John Carter of Mars*, and H. P. Lovecraft and *Conan* and yes, even *The Wizard of Oz*.

But I should also be honest about how I first encountered these comics. For better or worse, it was in the blazing onset of puberty. I don't know how the post-hippies and proto-slackers of America in 1977 reacted when Den & Kath & the Red Queen skin-romped across the early issues of *Heavy Metal*. I only remember the gland-punch a confused suburban teenager in Virginia felt when he first espied Kath & Den exploring their souped-up chassis. Is *this* what adulthood held in store? If so, why was I wasting my time playing *Space Invaders* and *Galaga*?

Richard Corben cut right to the nasty core of what attracted so many people to weird horror and border science fiction.

Because yes, there was the Lovecraftian risk of body warpage, cellular atrocity, and permanent exile from the human gene pool—especially when you rubbed up against the

unknowable. Losing your sanity after having your molecules scrambled was a kindness.

But there was also the Burroughs-ian gamble of winding up in a new environment better than where you were on Earth. Back on our world, you might be a four-eyed dweeb or frigid spinster, but if you stumble through the right portal, *zap*! you're a pinup model on a fresh world full of horniness, peril, and more horniness.

So flip these pages and romp through a world that only existed in airbrushes on the sides of vans or Meatloaf album covers. This is the world of Corben, the progrock strip club at the far end of your mind.

Patton Oswalt
August 27, 2022
Savannah, GA

DOD

IT SEEMS I WAS FLOATING IN DARKNESS FOR AN EXTREMELY LONG TIME. SLOWLY JUMBLED CLOUDS OF ELECTRONEURAL IMPULSES COALESCED TO FORM MY MIND AND I BECAME AWARE OF MYSELF AS AN ENTITY. I DRIFTED ACROSS NEBULOUS UNFOCUSED COLORS.

AS I WANDERED THROUGH THE MAZE, I SAW SOMETHING. IT WAS AN IMAGE...A MEMORY, BUT IT WAS SO FUZZY AND INDISTINCT. IT SEEMED AS THOUGH I WAS LOOKING AT A BOOK...WHAT IS A BOOK?

WITHIN THE BOOK WAS AN UNCONNECTED PAGE. IT HAD SOMETHING ON IT...AN INCOMPREHENSIBLE LABYRINTH OF LINES. THE IMAGE FADED, SWEPT AWAY BY A SEARING LIGHT. OTHER SENSATIONS ACCOMPANIED THE RADIANCE, BOMBARDING MY EMERGING CONSCIOUSNESS.

WHO WAS I? WHERE WAS I?...THE LANDSCAPE WAS TOTALLY UNKNOWN TO ME, EVEN MY BODY WAS UNFAMILIAR.

WHAT FORCES BROUGHT ME HERE? I SEARCHED MY MIND FOR MEMORIES...THERE WAS SOMETHING THERE, BUT IT WAS TOO CLOUDED...A NAME...D...E...N...MY NAME IS DEN.

I SCANNED THE HORIZON. A DISTANT STRUCTURE ROSE OUT OF THE MISTS. I DECIDED TO GO THERE. PERHAPS IT HELD A CLUE TO THE MYSTERY.

I WALKED. MY BARE FOOTFALLS IN THE SAND CREATED THE ONLY SOUND. A SLIGHT BREEZE WAS A SMALL RELIEF IN THE HEAT.

AFTER SEVERAL HOURS' EXISTENCE IN THE DESOLATE LAND...

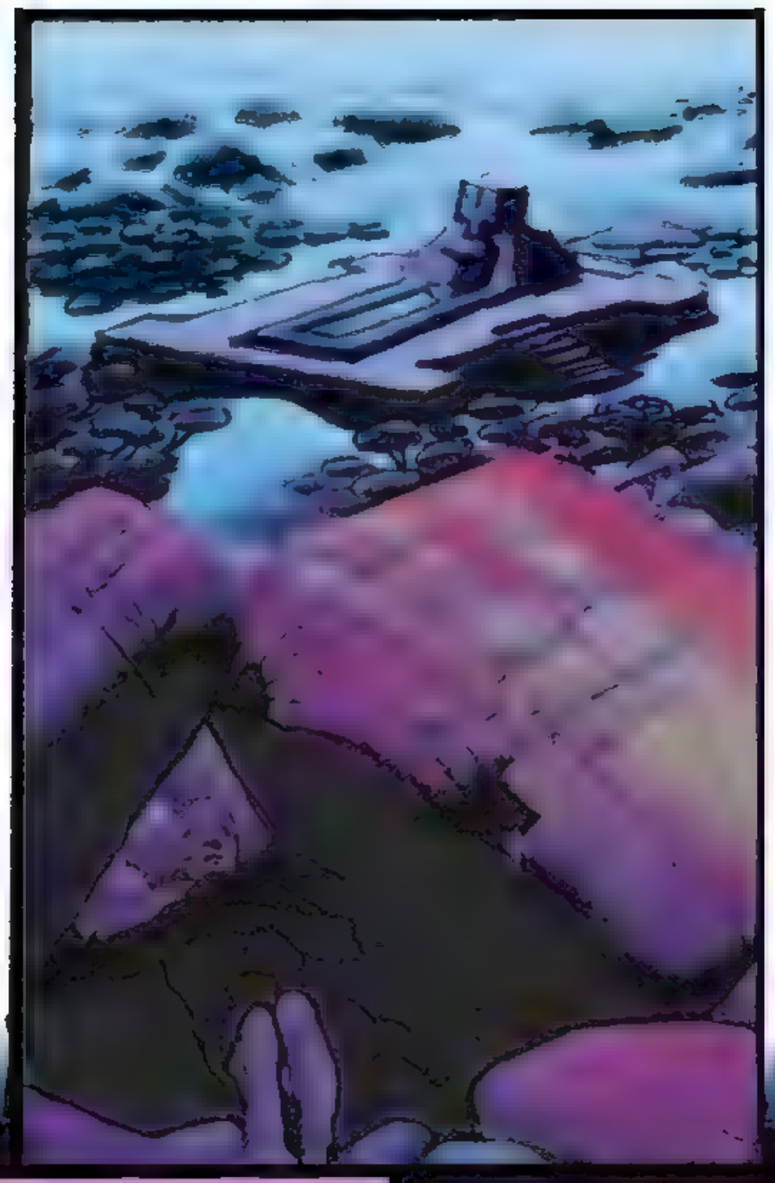
...I WAS OVERTAKEN BY A VACUOUS FEELING... *HUNGER--*

--FOOD!!

THERE WERE INSTINCTS, REFLEXES, AND A GOOD AMOUNT OF MUSCULAR DEXTERITY CONTAINED IN THIS BODY IN WHICH I FOUND MYSELF. I WAS THANKFUL BUT STILL CONFUSED.

AS EVENING APPROACHED, I CAME UPON AN ENIGMATIC OASIS WITH A FOUNTAIN. I PONDERED THE ARTISAN'S IDENTITY. I WAS HAPPY TO DRINK THE SWEET WATER WITHOUT PAUSE. THE ABUNDANT FRUITS WERE ALSO DELICIOUS.

AFTER FURTHER REFRESHING MYSELF, I THOUGHT TO FIND A PLACE TO SLEEP. APPREHENSIVE OF PREDACIOUS CREATURES THAT MIGHT HABIT THE FOUNTAIN, I LEFT ITS IMMEDIATE VICINITY AND FOUND A PROTECTED SPOT NEARBY.



NEAR MORNING DREAMS CAME TO ME. THERE WAS A PERSON, AND THE BOOK OF MY FORMER VISION. THE SURROUNDINGS WERE STRANGELY FAMILIAR.

THE MAN'S ATTENTION WAS WHOLLY UPON READING AND WAS SURPRISED BY THE DISCOVERY OF THE LOOSE PAPER. THEN THE SCENE CHANGED. THE MAN MANIPULATED MINIATURE STRUCTURES INTO AN INCOMPREHENSIBLE ASSEMBLY. I AWOKE WITH AN OVERWHELMING ANXIETY.

A CREATURE, THE LIKES OF WHICH I'D NEVER SEEN BEFORE, WAS DRINKING FROM THE POOL.

I WAS FROZEN WITH FEAR. COULD IT HEAR MY POUNDING HEART? COULD IT FIND ME FROM MY SCENT? COULD IT SENSE MY PRESENCE BY SOME UNKNOWN FACULTY?

APPARENTLY QUENCHED, THE LIZARDMAN LEFT AND DISAPPEARED AMONG THE ROCKS. I WAS ABOUT TO DESCEND FOR A DRINK WHEN--

ANOTHER FIGURE APPROACHED.

THE ORNAMENTED HEADDRESS AND ANKLETS EXUDED THE SOUND THAT ALERTED ME.

I CONCLUDED IT WAS AN INDIAN GIRL, WHICH GAVE ME NEW THOUGHTS ABOUT MY LOCATION. SHE DRANK AND LEFT.

CHA CHING CHA CHING CHA CHING CHA CHING CHA CHING CHA CHING CHA CHING CHA CHING CHA CHING

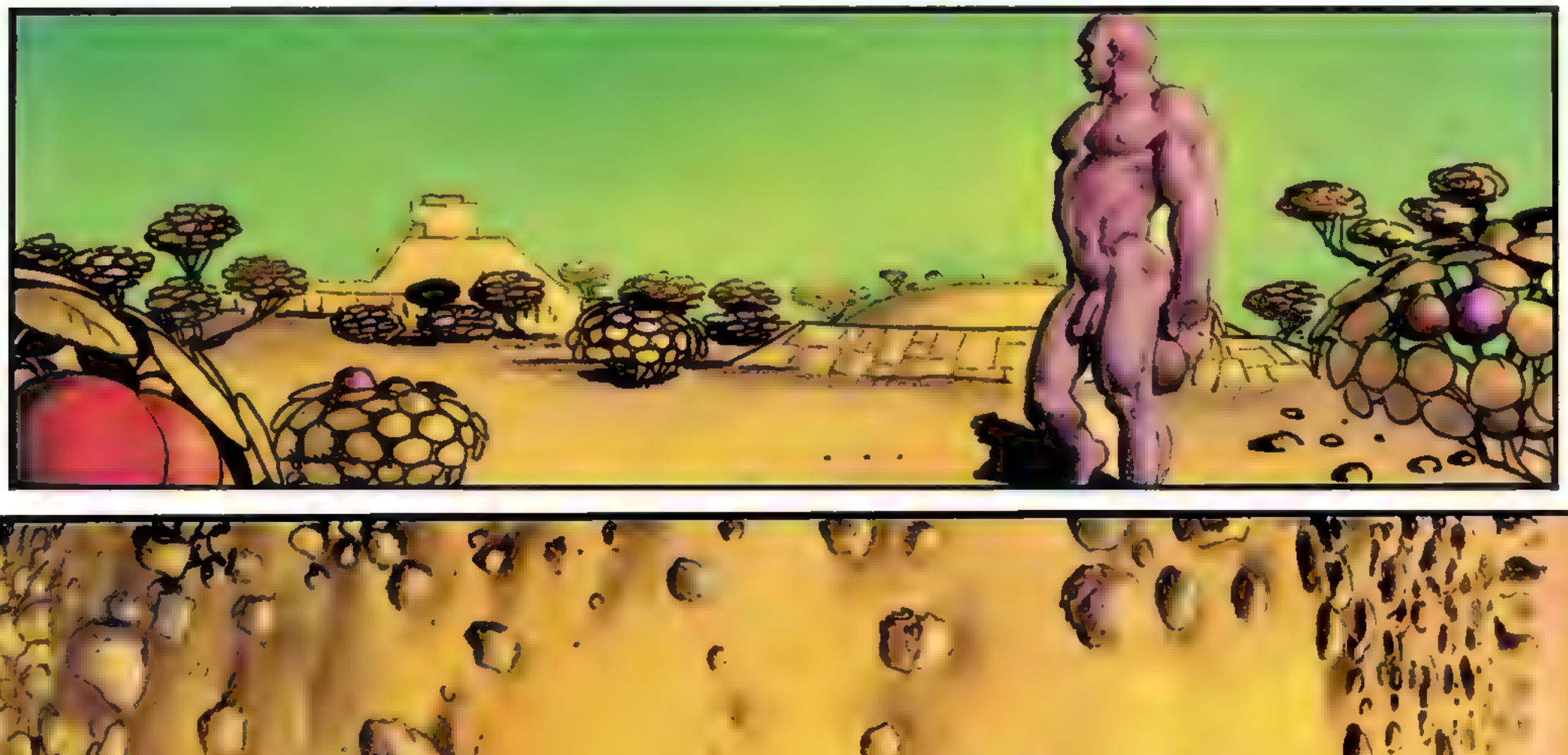
THE GIRL TRAVELED TOWARD THE EDIFICE. IT WAS MY QUEST ALSO, THOUGH I HAD NO PREDETERMINED PURPOSE THERE.

I ATE...

I DRANK...

AND FOLLOWED HER.

I STUDIED THE ARTIFACT AS I PASSED. I CONJECTURED THAT IT HOUSED MACHINERY THAT DREW WATER FROM ROCKS OR THE DEPTHS OF THE EARTH (IF THIS REALLY WAS EARTH). AND WAS POWERED BY SOLAR RAYS OR NUCLEAR ENERGY.



THIS WAS THE ONLY HUMAN I'D SEEN SINCE I HAD AWAKENED HERE. PERHAPS I SHOULD'VE CONFRONTED HER AND TRIED COMMUNICATION. AN OMINOUS AURA ABOUT HER DISCOURAGED THAT PLAN. IT WAS THE ***SOUND!!*** WHY WOULD A SANE PERSON TRAVEL IN THIS HOSTILE LAND WEARING NOISY ORNAMENTS WHICH COULD ATTRACT CARNIVOROUS BEASTS. I CIRCLED AHEAD TO WATCH HER PASS.

THE IMAGES STIRRED PHANTASMIC FORCES IN MY HEAD AND EROTIC ONES IN MY BODY.

SURPRISED AT MY OWN REACTION, I SAT MOTIONLESS, WONDERING ABOUT WHAT HAD CAUSED IT AND WHAT TO DO NEXT, WHEN A SHADOW CROSSED ME.

IT WAS THE LIZARDMAN I HAD SEEN EARLIER. WAS IT A COINCIDENCE THAT HE TRAVELED IN THIS SAME DIRECTION?...I REJECTED THIS THOUGHT. HE SEEMED INTENT UPON SOMETHING... THE GIRL...I WAS SUDDENLY AFRAID, NOT FOR MYSELF BUT FOR HER, EVEN THOUGH I DIDN'T KNOW HER.

DESPITE MY LACK OF A STRATEGY, I RESOLVED TO PREVENT THIS BEAST FROM HARMING THE INDIANESS.

I FOLLOWED THE LIZARDMAN--

WHO FOLLOWED THE GIRL--

WHOSE DESTINATION WAS APPARENTLY THE ARCHITECTURAL ANOMALY, BUT HER PURPOSE THERE WAS STILL A COMPLETE MYSTERY.

THE BEAST'S INTENTIONS BECAME OBVIOUS AS WE ENTERED THE BUILDING COMPLEX. I RUSHED TO HIDE AMONG THE SCULPTURES ALONG THE STAIRCASE BETWEEN THEM.

THE PREDATOR HISSED AN EXPECTANT CHUCKLE.

HEH HEH HEH!

FRANTICALLY, I SEARCHED FOR A WEAPON.

THE GIRL TURNED AND SAW THE LIZARD BUT DIDN'T SEEM FRIGHTENED.

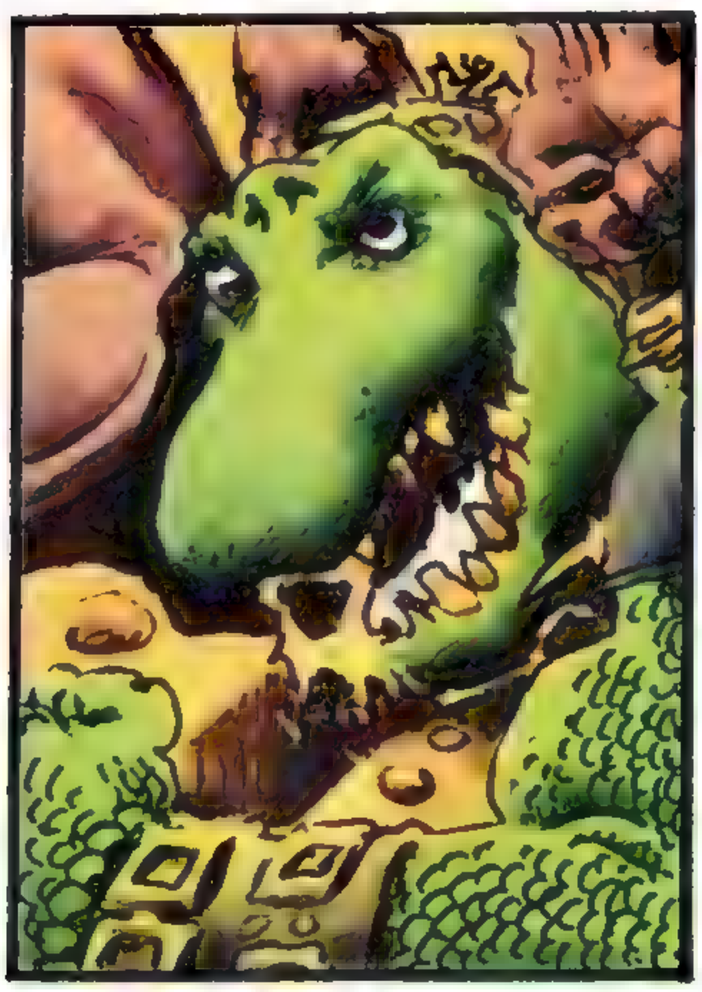
I CHARGED!!!

YAAAAAAAA!

THE STONE STRUCK THE BEAST.

I CRASHED INTO HIM, GRABBING FOR HIS KNIFE.

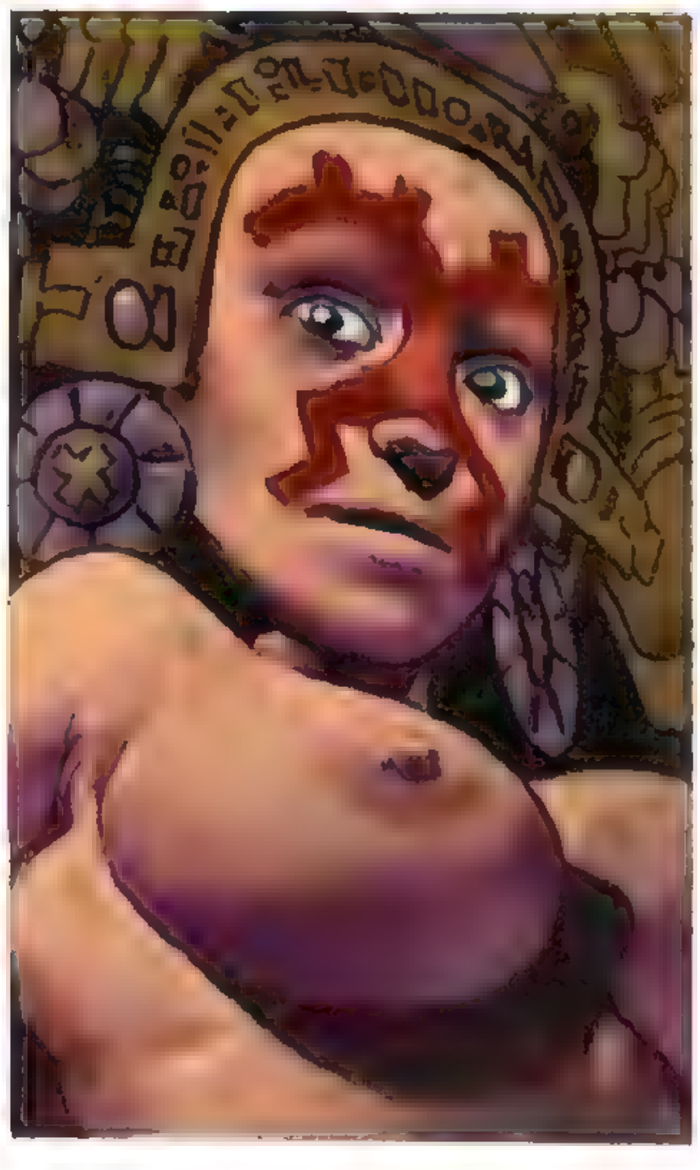
BUT SUCCEEDED ONLY IN KNOCKING IT AWAY.



THE BLOW SHOULD'VE KILLED HIM. HE WAS HARDLY STUNNED.

I DIDN'T WANT TO GIVE HIM A CHANCE TO THINK.

THE GIRL REMAINED, WATCHING.



MY BODY MADE MOVEMENTS UNFAMILIAR TO MY CONSCIOUS MIND. IT WAS AS THOUGH IT HAD BEEN HIGHLY TRAINED AND WAS UNDER THE CONTROL OF ANOTHER PART OF MY BRAIN.

THE LIZARD'S STRONGEST BLOW CAUGHT ME UNPREPARED. I GUESS I THOUGHT HE WAS GOING TO CLOSE IN AND GRAB ME AGAIN. UNCONSCIOUS, I WAS THROWN AMONG THE STONEWORKS AND FELL BELOW THE STAIRCASE.

THEN IT CAME TO ME. MY NAME IS...WAS DAVID ELLIS NORMAN. I WAS MOURNING MY UNCLE DANIEL'S DEATH. THEY HAD NEVER FOUND HIM, BUT NOW, AFTER SEVEN YEARS, IT WAS LEGAL. SOME OF HIS BELONGINGS HAD COME INTO MY POSSESSION, INCLUDING HIS BURROUGHS FANTASY NOVELS. IN THE BACK OF ONE WAS A PIECE OF PAPER WITH AN ELECTRONIC SCHEMATIC DRAWN ON IT...

THERE WAS ALSO A LETTER...ADDRESSED TO ME.

Dear David,
I foresee you reading this some years after my disappearance. It is because we shared so many interests and a kinship that went beyond our common blood, that I write. I may be dead as you read; I have no way of knowing what lies ahead for me in that other world. This much is certain: my chances are better there, despite the dangers, than here, facing certain slow death. You weren't aware of my withering illness. I am slowly losing life; it begins in the limbs and crawls slowly, relentlessly, to finish in the heart. So I bid you farewell and leave while I have the strength and resolution.
Goodbye,
Dan

I KNEW THE SCHEMATIC WAS A CLUE. I DECIDED TO BUILD IT.

COLLECTING THE PARTS REQUIRED WAS NOT WITHOUT DIFFICULTY. SOME WERE EXOTIC SPECIAL-ORDER ITEMS; OTHERS HAD BECOME OBSOLETE. BUT MOST WERE READILY AVAILABLE RESISTORS, CAPACITORS, DIODES, TRANSISTORS, ETC. FINALLY, I COMMENCED WORK ON THE CONTRAPTION.

WHEN IT WAS COMPLETE, I WAS STILL PUZZLED. WHAT DID IT DO? I FELT SURE THAT IT WAS A CLUE TO MY UNCLE'S DISAPPEARANCE. FOR FEAR THE THING MIGHT EXPLODE WHEN I TURNED IT ON, ALSO TO ESCAPE DERISIVE COMMENTS OF FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS, I TOOK THE DEVICE TO AN ABANDONED FARM AREA TO TRY IT OUT.

CLICK
BZZZ

I HAD TO FIND MY UNCLE. I STEPPED INTO THE SWIRLING LIGHT...AND LOST CONSCIOUSNESS.

I REAWAKENED AMONG DECAYED STONEWORK. I HAD NOT FOUND MY UNCLE, BUT THERE WERE MORE URGENT MATTERS AT HAND.

I PEERED OUT, EXPECTING TO SEE THE GIRL OR THE LIZARDMAN.

THE STONE PORCH AREA WAS EMPTY...THEN INHUMAN SOUNDS SHATTERED THE SILENCE.

GRAAAAAARRRRGH

RIIIP

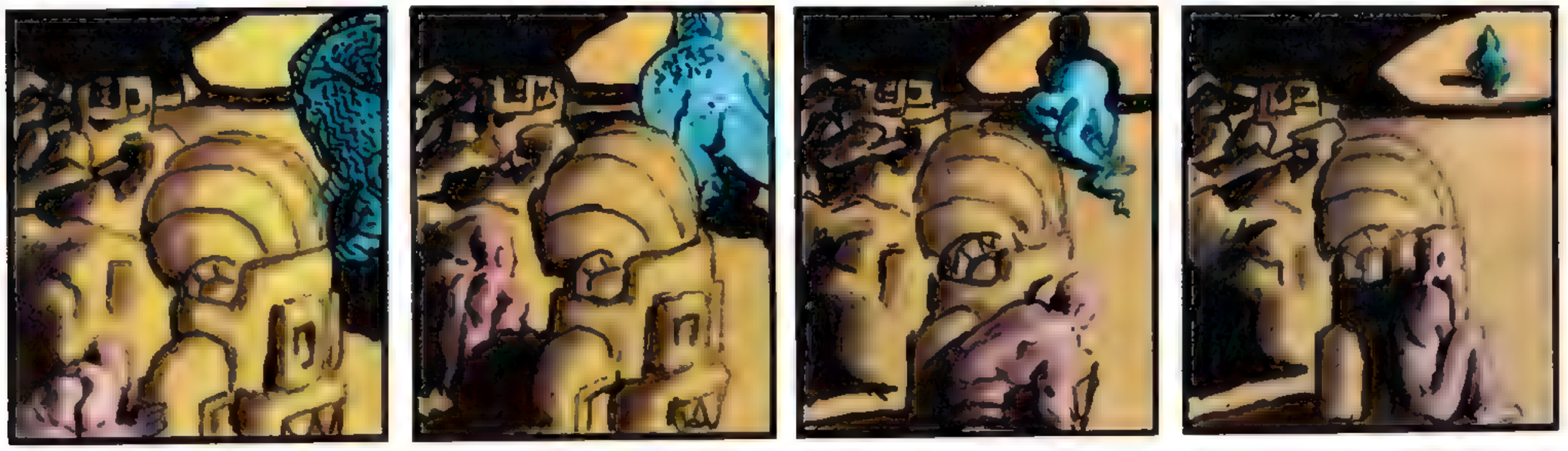
CRUNCH

CRUNCH

CHOMP

I WAS ILL PREPARED FOR THE SIGHT THAT FOLLOWED.

A ***DRAGON*** AND THE INDIAN GIRL. THEY WERE FRIENDS AND CHEWING ON THE LIZARDMAN'S CARCASS. IT WAS A SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP: SHE LURED THE PREY, THE DRAGON DID THE BLOODY WORK.



NO SIGN OF UNCLE DAN. DID I MAKE THE MACHINE RIGHT? HAVE OTHER FORCES CHANGED SINCE HE MADE HIS MACHINE?...WILL I EVER GET BACK?...DO I ***WANT*** TO RETURN?...I GUESS I'LL HAVE TO LOOK AROUND AND SEE...

FOR HOURS I SAT ON THE ANCIENT STONE PORCH, WATCHING THE CHANGING CLOUD PATTERNS. CRICKET CREATURES ADDED THEIR SOUND ACCOMPANIMENT TO THE COLORED TABLEAU. A COLD MOOD OF BEWILDERMENT AND LONELINESS SETTLED INTO MY BONES AS I RESTED. I WAS A STRANGER IN THIS LAND, A STRANGER EVEN IN THIS BODY. SHOULD I CONTINUE THE SEARCH FOR MY UNCLE? OR SHOULD I TRY TO RETURN TO MY OTHER HOME, MY OTHER SELF? WITH NO CONFLICTS RESOLVED, I DRIFTED INTO A DREAMLESS SLUMBER.

©1975 RICHARD CORBEN

A FAINT, DISTANT SOUND BROUGHT ME INSTANTLY AWAKE.

IT WAS THE HUSHED WHISPER OF MEN WALKING.

BUT NOT MEN.

A STRANGE PROCESSION HAD PENETRATED THE SOUTHERN COURTYARD OF THE CRUMBLING EDIFICE. THEY MOVED QUIETLY WITH BARELY A MUFFLED WHISPER OF LEATHER BOOTS BRUSHING THE SAND. I NEARLY MISSED THE MUTED BARK OF A COMMAND; THE TROOP FROZE INSTANTLY.

ONE FIGURE, WHO RODE A BEAST, DISMOUNTED.

I REALIZE THAT IT WAS A WOMAN, A WOMAN WHO MOVED WITH REGAL AUTHORITY.

TWO MEMBERS OF THE MONSTROUS SQUAD REMAINED WITH THE MOUNT AS THE OTHERS FOLLOWED THE WOMAN. SHE LED THE GROUP SOMBERLY DEEPER INTO THE BUILDING. THEY CARRIED TWO SACKS. I THOUGHT I SAW A HINT OF MOVEMENT FROM WITHIN THE WRAPPINGS.

I SHOULD HAVE LEARNED FROM MY LAST EXPERIENCE HERE THAT CURIOSITY CAN HAVE DEADLY CONSEQUENCES, BUT SOMETHING COMPELLED ME TO FOLLOW.

I TURNED SUDDENLY AT A FLUTTERING NOISE.

A LARGE BAT THING HAD PERCHED NEARBY AND SAT WATCHING. IT WAS ANOTHER CREATURE TOTALLY UNFAMILIAR.

THE SEMI-MEN AND THEIR LEADER CONTINUED TO AN UNKNOWN PLACE WITHIN THE BUILDING AT A SLOW, DELIBERATE PACE. FINALLY THEY REACHED A CYCLOPEAN, TRUNCATED PYRAMID AND PAUSED SOME MOMENTS.

I CREPT UP ON THE OPPOSITE WALL AS THE WOMAN ASCENDED STEPS WITH TWO GUARDS CARRYING ONE OF THE BURDENS. I GAINED THE EDGE AND PEERED DOWN. THE STRUCTURE WAS HOLLOW, WITH A GLIMMER OF WATER FROM WITHIN.

AAAH YAAAA, SUM NOBLOK N'CABU... N'ZIGNA

ULUHTC! ULUHTC! ULUHTC!

GURGLE BUBBLE

COUGH! COUGH! GUK!

SPLASH!

I WAS SHOCKED. SEVERAL THOUGHTS SHOT THROUGH MY HEAD IN LIGHTNING SUCCESSION. SOMETHING URGED ME TO RUN AWAY... OR COULD I SAVE THE VICTIM?...SHOULD I KILL THOSE BRUTAL FIENDS? (HAH!)

JUST AS I WAS GULPING AIR, READYING MYSELF TO DIVE INTO THE UNCANNY POOL, THE MAN WAS PLUCKED BY SOMETHING BENEATH!

SPLUK!

IN THE INSTANTS OF MY RENEWED INDECISION, THE LUCKLESS HUMAN WAS GONE.

THEN I REALIZED THIS BLASPHEMOUS CEREMONY WOULD BE REPEATED WITH THE SECOND SACRIFICE.

SUDDENLY A DIFFERENT LEVEL OF CONSCIOUSNESS TOOK CONTROL, AND I WAS RUNNING...TOWARD THE SACRIFICERS.

STOP! STOP!

I LEAPED HIGH FROM THE OUTER WALL TO THE GUARDS ON THE ALTAR OUTCROPPING.

IT'S HIM!

THAT CRYPTIC EXCLAMATION STUCK IN MY HEAD, AND I LASHED OUT A KICK AS HE MOVED ASIDE FROM A NEAR COLLISION WITH MY MAIN THRUST.

SNAP!

THE IMPACT THREW THE FIRST GUARD OFF THE PRECARIOUS ALTAR. THE SECOND GUARD QUICKLY DREW A KNIFE...

...AND LUNGED.

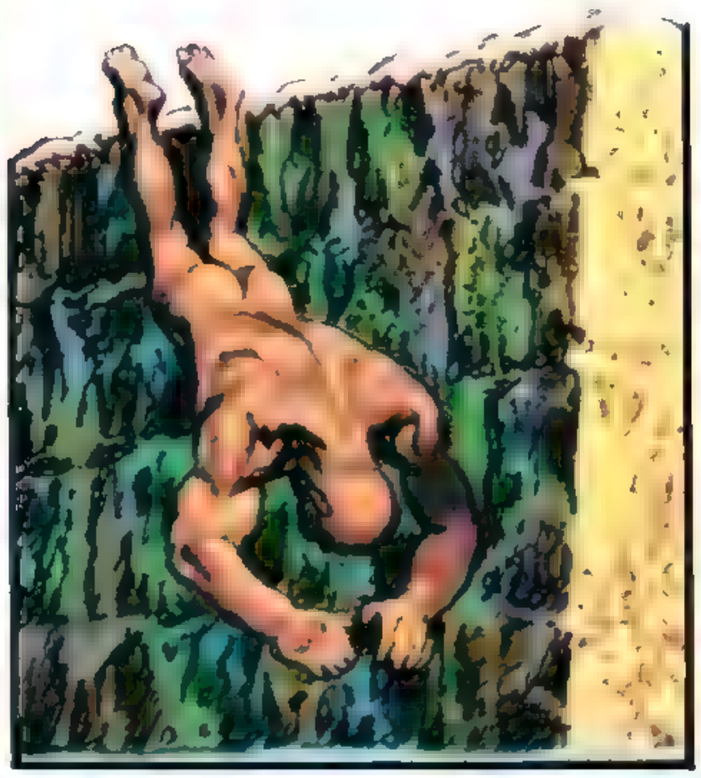
I SWEPT HIS FEET AWAY AND HE ALSO FELL INTO THE WATER.

RRRGH!

THE WOMAN THREW DOWN HER MASK AND FOR THE SPACE OF A HEARTBEAT ALL MOVEMENT CEASED AND HELD. SHE GLARED AT ME MALEVOLENTLY. I SEEMED PARALYZED. SHE PLAYED AN IMPORTANT PART IN THIS BODY'S PAST...BUT WHAT?

THEN SHE CONTEMPTUOUSLY PUSHED THE VICTIM OVER THE SIDE.

THIS JARRED ME BACK INTO ACTION AND BEFORE THE ARMED PARTY COULD REACH ME, I DIVED.

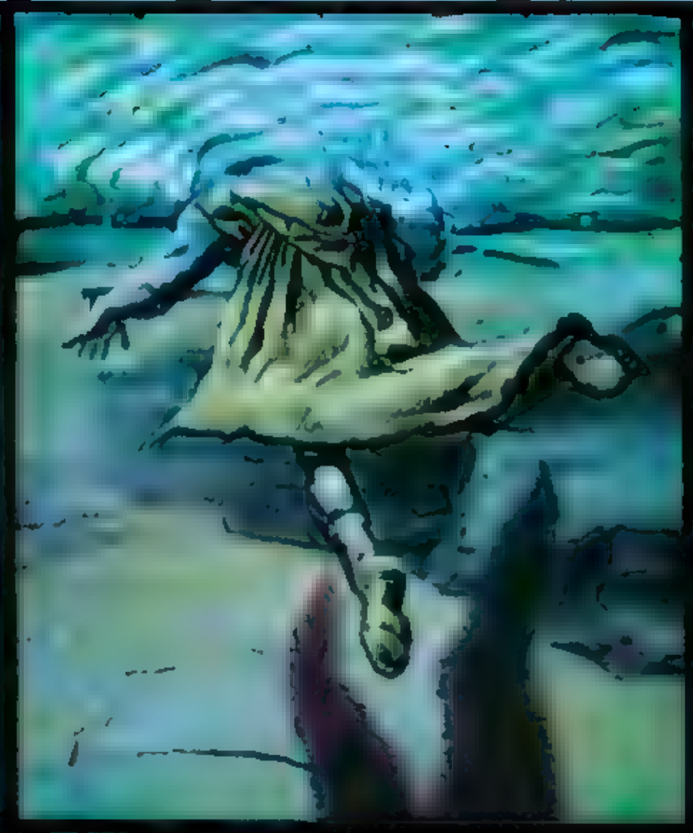


FROM BEHIND CAME AN EAR-SPLITTING SCREECH THAT WAS CUT SHORT AS I SUBMERGED.

UNDERWATER, I GRABBED THE TIED FIGURE AND STARTED TO MAKE FOR ONE OF THE SIDE WALLS. ONE OF THE GUARDS WAS SWIMMING BACK TO THE ALTAR. THE OTHER WAS NOWHERE IN SIGHT.

IN THIS MURKY LIQUID I SENSED ANOTHER PRESENCE. I HOOKED MY NEW DEPENDENT'S LEGS OVER MY HEAD TO SWIM ON WITH BOTH HANDS.

AFTER A FEW STROKES, I LOOKED BACK TOWARD THE GUARD AND SAW...OR HALF-SAW...A FRIGHTENING, SHADOWY FORM.



IT GRASPED THE GUARD'S FLAILING LEGS AND JERKED HIM DOWN.

FRANTICALLY I SOUGHT TO ESCAPE. THERE WERE SEVERAL DECAYED HOLES IN THE WALL.

WE MADE IT WITHIN JUST AS A NIGHTMARISH, SERPENTINE LIMB WRIGGLED OVER THE APERTURE.

NOT YET TOTALLY RESOLVED TO DIE, I LOOKED ABOUT THE CAVITY AND SAW THAT MUCH OF THE STONE-WORK WAS LOOSE.

I LIFTED A KEY PIECE AND SUDDENLY WAS PROPELLED FORWARD. I BLACKED OUT.

I FOUND MY WARD AND MYSELF BREATHING AIR AT LAST.

THERE WERE A FEW BODIES LYING ABOUT. PERCHED NEARBY EATING, THE BAT CREATURE WAS THE APPARENT CAUSE. THE PRIESTESS WAS GONE. MY BURDEN MOVED.

OOOOH!

COME! RUN FOR THE BAT CREATURE!

ARNOLD & COBBEN

WE LEAPT ONTO THE MONSTER'S BACK AND CLUNG TENACIOUSLY TO ITS DIRTY, MATTED FUR.

THE BEAST BORE US ALOFT NOT A SECOND TOO SOON AS THE GUARDS RAN TOWARD US.

HYAH!

STOP THEM! GET THEM OR YOU FOOLS WILL DIE!

AFTER AN HOUR, I COAXED THE MONSTER DOWN TO A PEACEFUL PLACE OF REFUGE FOR FOOD AND WATER.

THE STRANGE, GLOBULAR FRUIT OF THIS WORLD WAS ESPECIALLY ABUNDANT HERE. WE DIDN'T GO HUNGRY OR THIRSTY...AND FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE MY ARRIVAL ON THIS STRANGE SOIL, I LISTENED TO A HUMAN VOICE.

I CAN'T THANK YOU ENOUGH FOR SAVING ME...

HOW DID THAT INHUMAN WOMAN GET A HOLD OF YOU?

WHAT? SO AM I!

WELL, YOU MAY NOT BELIEVE THIS...I'M FROM ANOTHER WORLD OTHER THAN THIS ONE...A PLACE CALLED ***EARTH!***

ANOTHER ONE! THAT MONSTER MUST BE KIDNAPPING EVERYONE! MY NAME IS KATHERINE WELLS--I'M FROM LONDON. TIME MAKES NO DIFFERENCE HERE, BUT THERE IT WAS THE SUMMER OF 1892 AND I'D GONE TO THE COUNTRY TO WRITE. I'M A NOVELIST, YOU SEE.

IT WAS EVENING...I'D GONE FOR A WALK IN THE MARSH. I WAS FOLLOWING ONE OF THE WILL-OF-THE-WISPS, WHICH SEEMED TO LEAD ME TO A GLOWING GATE. STEPPING THROUGH, I SUDDENLY FELT AFIRE AND FOUND MYSELF IN THIS STRANGE WORLD...CHANGED AND NAKED, CAPTURED BY THAT MONSTROUS WOMAN!

SUDDENLY, AT KATHERINE'S WORDS OF A MARSH LIGHT, I HAD A DISTURBING RECOLLECTION OF A SHIMMERING GLOW, A CREATURE OF LIGHT THAT BECKONED SOMEONE THROUGH A DIMENSIONAL WARP LIKE MY OWN. THE PERSON WAS UNCLE DAN! HOW COULD I REMEMBER THAT? IT WASN'T MY MEMORY!

HERE, I AM DIFFERENT!

ON EARTH I WAS THIN AND WEAKLY--FIT ONLY TO STAY INDOORS AND WRITE...BUT HERE I LIVE MORE FULLY...HERE I AM MORE OF A WOMAN!

THE SAME HERE...I SEEM BETTER FITTED AND ADAPTABLE ON THIS WORLD.

IT IS STRANGE THAT THE BAT ATTACKED THOSE GUARDS YET CARRIED US TO SAFETY.

IT IS SAID THAT THE REBEL BANDITS TRAIN SUCH CREATURES TO PREY UPON THE QUEEN'S MEN.

SO SHE'S A QUEEN!

A QUEEN AND A SORCERESS.

I'VE HEARD THAT SHE COULD WILL OBJECTS INTO EXISTENCE SUCH AS WEAPONS.

ANOTHER ODD VISION INTRUDED. IT WAS THE QUEEN CREATING WEAPONS AS KATHERINE DESCRIBED.

THE MEMORY WAS FOREIGN TO ME! THE PHANTOM PICTURES HAUNTED MY MIND. WHY DID THEY APPEAR SO TITILLATINGLY, YET WITH NO CONTENT.

OUR DEFENSE WOULD BE SIMPLIFIED IF I COULD DO IT...WILL INTO MY HAND A .45 AUTOMATIC PISTOL.

I KNOW NOT OF A ".45 AUTOMATIC PISTOL," BUT YOU RISKED YOUR LIFE TO SAVE MINE AND I LOVE YOU FOR IT.

THEREFORE I PUT INTO YOUR HANDS WHATEVER PLEASURE I CAN GIVE.

IT SEEMED THAT THIS NEW LIFE OF MINE OFFERED NOT ONLY GREAT RISKS BUT GREAT REWARDS.

I COULD NEVER HAVE ATTAINED A WOMAN OF KATHERINE'S BEAUTY ON EARTH, BUT HERE SHE WAS MINE.

SCOUR THE COUNTRYSIDE WITH YOUR GOONS, SKOOR-NEGG! WE MUST FIND THE GIRL *KEETH-REN!*

I BROUGHT HER FROM EARTH TO SACRIFICE TO GREAT ***UHLUHTC*** BECAUSE HER DOUBLE HERE IN NEVERWHERE IS USELESS IN THE CEREMONY. AS LONG AS THE TWO KEETH-RENS EXIST TOGETHER IN THE SAME DIMENSION, THE BALANCE OF OUR WORLD IS UPSET!

HURRY! FIND THEM OR IN DAYS THE BALANCE WILL BE SHATTERED AND THE WORLD DESTROYED!

WE LAY IN A GARDEN WITH OUR PASSION SPENT. I WAS SURROUNDED WITH LOVE AND BEAUTY. I HAD EXPERIENCED PLEASURES UNDREAMED OF. THE FOLIAGE WAS RICH AND SWEET. HER BODY WAS SOFT AND WARM.

THEN, AS WE WERE ABOUT TO RENEW OUR PLAY, A TENSE, EVIL GIGGLE SLICED THROUGH THE STILL AIR.

HE, HE, HE, HE! WHAT A LOVELY SCENE OF COUPLING WORMS. MY PET HAS BROUGHT ME MANY FINE SURPRISES, BUT NONE TO COMPARE WITH THIS.

YES, I KNOW YOU, MY FRIENDS. YOU, KEETH-REN, APPARENTLY HAVE ESCAPED THE ROYAL BITCH'S CEREMONY. THAT IS TO OUR GOOD. IT SHALL NEVER HAPPEN NOW.

AH, AH, DEN. CALM DOWN. DON'T YOU REMEMBER ME? I'M GEL. WE PLAYED PAWNS IN THAT UNFORGETTABLE ADVENTURE YEARS AGO.

NO, I DON'T KNOW YOU, GEL, AND I WISH YOU WOULD LEAVE US ALONE HERE.

I'M AFRAID I CAN'T DO THAT. YOU ARE BOTH VERY IMPORTANT TO ME...MY PRISONERS.

AS HE FINISHED UTTERING THAT WORD, A SLIGHT RUSTLING WHISPERED FROM ALL AROUND US. GEL HAD US.

DON'T TRY TO ESCAPE! DEN, YOU COME FROM A WORLD WITH AUTOMATIC FIREARMS--YOU MUST REALIZE YOU CAN'T OUTRUN THESE.

KOTH-ROST, TIE THEM.

WAIT! WE'VE DONE NOTHING AGAINST YOU. WON'T YOU TELL US WHY YOU HATE US?

VERY WELL, DEN. YOU SEEM TO BE SUFFERING FROM AMNESIA, SO I'LL TELL YOU...THEN KILL YOU.

I LEAD THESE REBELS AGAINST THAT VILE QUEEN'S TYRANNY. SHE PLANS TO UNLEASH A MONSTROUS ***HORROR*** ON THIS WORLD, ONE THAT EVEN SHE MUST BOW BEFORE. SHE THINKS SHE CAN CONTROL IT FOR HER OWN AMBITIONS.

"TO GAIN THE AID OF MY FOLK, SHE APPEALED TO THE CRIMINAL CLASS'S DARKER PRINCIPLES. THOSE MORE UPRIGHT SHE TORTURED. SHE BREEDS MY PEOPLE WITH THE EVIL THINGS FROM THE DARK REGIONS BEYOND, MAKING A RACE OF FIENDS TO SERVE HER.

"BETWEEN THE WORLDS ON THE OUTSIDE LIE ANCIENT, POWERFUL, AND EVIL FORCES THAT CONSTANTLY TRY TO BREAK INTO THE REAL WORLD, ALL WORLDS...EVEN YOUR EARTH HAS DOORWAYS FOR THESE FORCES. THE QUEEN FOUND OLD, OLD MAGIC AND POWER IN THOSE ANCIENT RUINS AND ONE OF THOSE GATEWAYS TO THE OUTSIDE. SHE BREEDS MY PEOPLE INTO A DEGENERATE RACE OF SLAVES TO OPEN THAT GATE.

"SHE SACRIFICES YOU HUMAN FOLK EVERY NEW MOON TO THAT ***THING,*** DRAWING ***IT*** CLOSER TO THE ALMOST-READY DOORWAY. AND THE LAND GROWS STEADILY MORE SINISTER WITH ***ITS*** APPROACH!

"KEETH-REN IS A VITAL KEY TO THE QUEEN'S PLAN, SO TO PREVENT HER SACRIFICE, SHE MUST BE ELIMINATED."

OUR WORLD WOULD BE RAVAGED AND BARREN AND OUR PEOPLE INSANE IF THIS THING COMES TO PASS. THAT'S WHY I LEAD THE REVOLT AGAINST HER. WE MUST STOP HER BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE!

DEN, YOU MUST DIE BECAUSE YOU WERE THE QUEEN'S PAWN. YOU TOOK THE MAGIC LOC-NAR FROM ME AND GAVE IT TO HER.

KILL THEM!

I'M GLAD YOU SAID THAT. YOU ARE TRADING A QUICK, PAINLESS DEATH FOR A SLOW ONE.

UNTIE HIM.

TO THE DEATH!

IF I WIN, WE WILL BE FREED?

BUT YOU ARE A NOBLE WARRIOR! WOULDN'T YOU PREFER TO AVENGE THE WRONG WITH A TRIAL BY COMBAT?

STOP!

HA! ***HA!***

THIS BELLIGERENT CHIEFTAIN KNEW ME, WHICH ADDED A PSYCHOLOGICAL EDGE TO HIS OBVIOUS PHYSICAL ADVANTAGES. I THRUST!

OH?

THUP!

HE MOVED ASIDE EFFORTLESSLY. HIS BLURRED COUNTERATTACKS SEEMED NOW LIKE A CUTTING WHIP...

...NOW LIKE A KICKING MULE.

HEH?

BWAAM!

BATTLE! THE QUEEN'S ***BUGS*** ARE ATTACKING!

GEL SUDDENLY THOUGHT TO END THE TRIAL QUICKLY, TO ATTEND TO THE NEW THREAT. DESPERATELY, I TRIED TO ESCAPE. THE GROWING DARKNESS CLOSED IN. MY ARMS FLAILED ABOUT, GRASPING FOR ANYTHING.

GAAAAAAAUGH!

THUD!

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YAAAAAAH!

I GRABBED WILDLY, CRUSHING GEL'S GENITALS AN INSTANT BEFORE MY NECK WOULD HAVE SNAPPED. I SCREAMED WITH THE EFFORT OF THROWING HIM BACK. HE BELLOWED HIS AGONY.

KATH!

BAM BAM

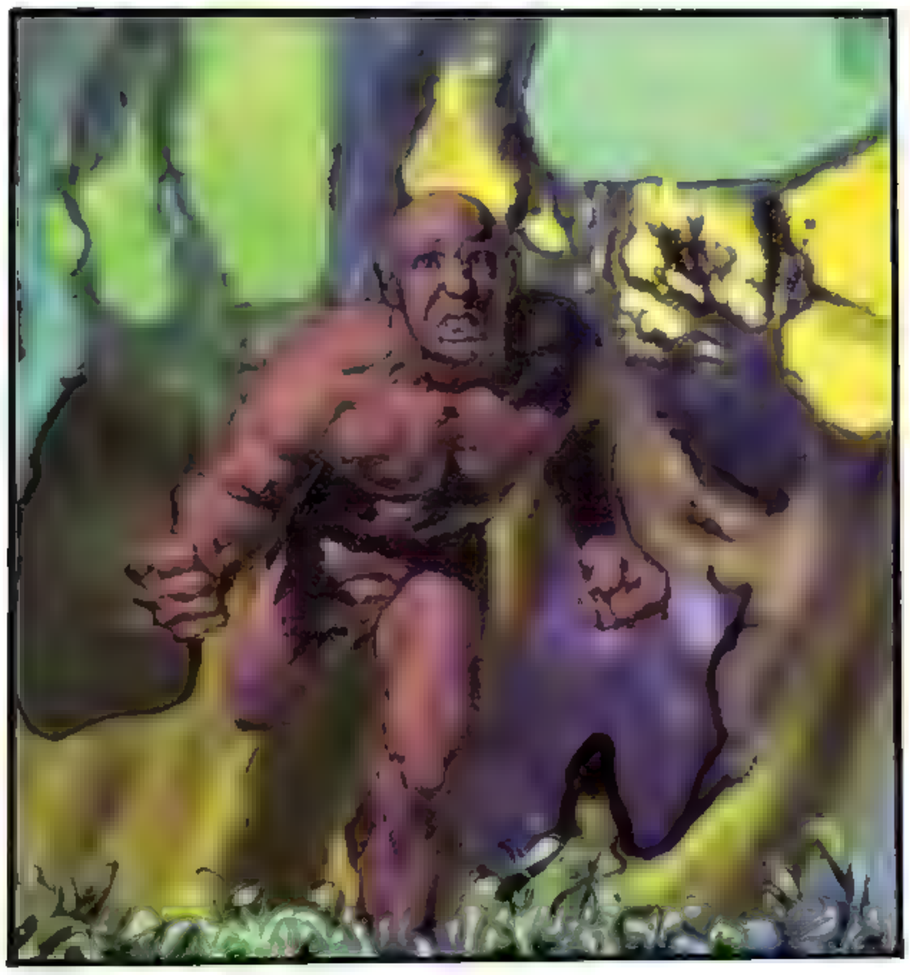
BLAM!

BLAM

KATH!

ONE OF THE INSECT WARRIORS HAD GRABBED KATH AND BORE HER ONTO HIS MOUNT. EVEN AS I CHARGED, THEY FLEW.

THE SPEAR HIT THE FLIER BUT DID NOT STOP IT. I ZIGZAGGED ACROSS THE BATTLEFIELD AND RAN HEADLONG THROUGH THE THICK UNDERGROWTH TO ELUDE THE COMBATANTS.



I RAN HARD AND THOUGHT MY HEART WOULD BURST. KATH'S LIFE DEPENDED UPON IT.

AS I BROKE ONTO THE OPEN DESERT, I WAS DISMAYED TO SEE THE ABDUCTOR AND A COMRADE RAPIDLY RECEDE IN THE ALIEN SKY. MECHANICALLY I CONTINUED THE FUTILE PURSUIT. A THIRD TINY DOT ROSE TOWARD THE FLEEING PAIR.

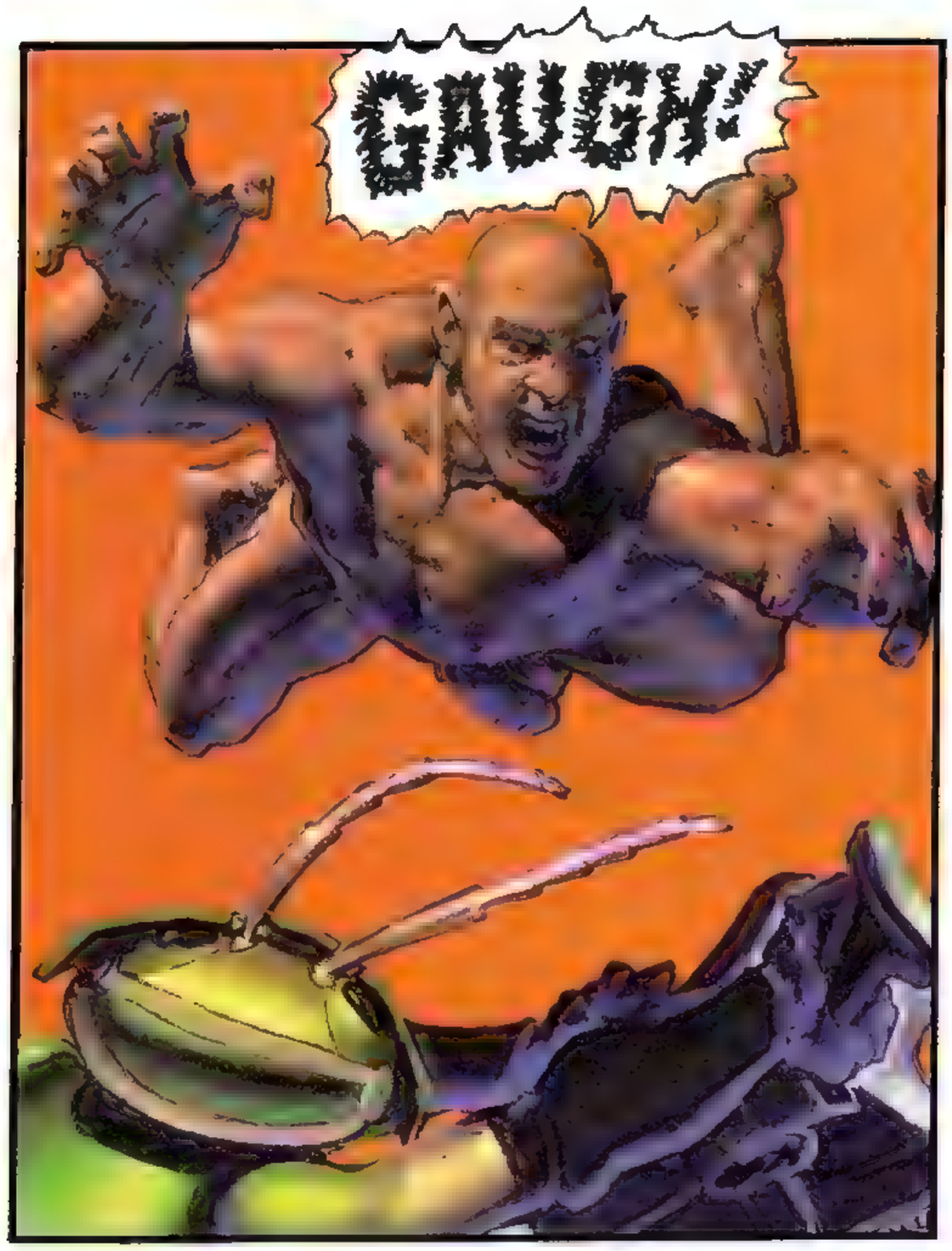
I WAS ASTONISHED TO SEE THE THIRD SPOT ATTACK THE FIRST TWO.

THE NEWCOMER STRUCK ONE OF THE INSECT FLIERS AND IT PLUMMETED.

THEN THE STRANGER CIRCLED AND WORRIED KATH'S ABDUCTOR. I PRAYED SHE WOULD NOT FALL.

SUDDENLY THE SPOTS JOINED FOR A SECOND AND THEN THE INSECT STARTED DOWNWARD. I IMPOTENTLY SCREAMED IN ANGUISH AND RAN ON.

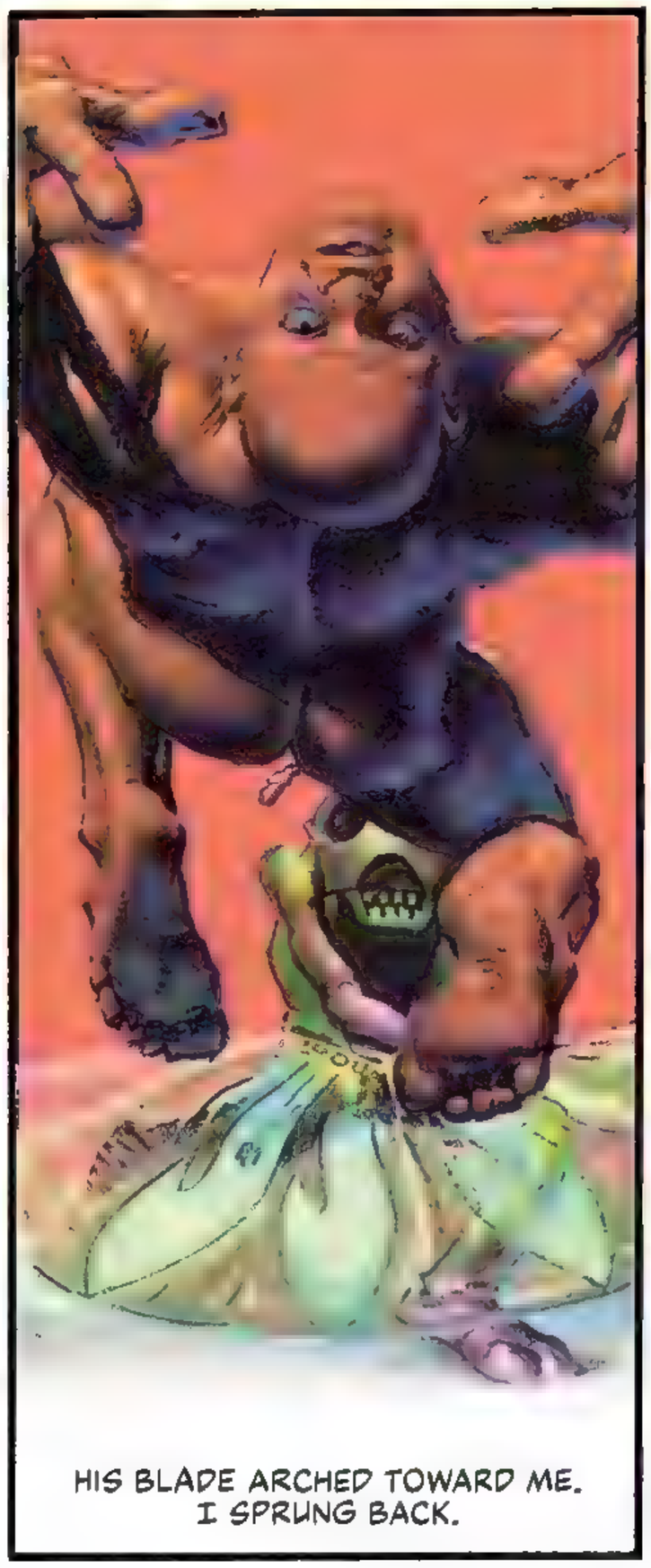
MY ENERGY WAS SPENT AS I STAGGERED TO THE FALLEN INSECT. KATH WAS NOT THERE AND THE CREATURE WAS STILL VERY MUCH ALIVE.



AS HE REACHED FOR HIS FIREARM, I LEAPED.

I GRABBED THE INSECT AND ROLLED, PULLING HIM WITH ME.

HE WAS UP INSTANTLY, BRANDISHING A SHORTSWORD.



HIS BLADE ARCHED TOWARD ME. I SPRUNG BACK.

I LANDED ON HIS DEAD MOUNT AND WITHDREW THE GUN. HE DREW BACK THE SWORD...

KRAK!

...AND THREW IT AS I FIRED.

THE INSECT'S THROAT EXPLODED. HE LEAPED WITH ARMS AND LEGS FLAILING. WHEN HE HIT THE SAND, HE WAS DEAD. I WAS UNTOUCHED.

THE STRANGER LANDED. IT WAS A HUMAN WARRIOR AND HE HAD KATH. I DID NOT KNOW WHETHER TO THANK HIM OR START SHOOTING.

NO, DEN. THIS IS KANG. HE SAVED ME.

HELLO, DEN. I WAS ON MY WAY TO THE RUINS AT NEBORC WHEN I SAW THOSE FIENDS WITH KATH.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY, KANG. THANK YOU. WE'RE GREATLY INDEBTED TO YOU.

NEVER MIND THAT. COME TAKE SOME FOOD WITH ME. I WOULD SPEAK TO YOU OF OTHER THINGS.

I'M RELIEVED THAT EVERYONE WE MEET IN THIS LAND ISN'T TRYING TO KILL US.

YOU HAVE THE LOOKS OF ONE WHO INTENDS TO SURVIVE REGARDLESS OF THE ODDS. WILL YOU ACCOMPANY ME TO THOSE RUINS? I AM MEETING A PERSON THERE AND HE CAN OFFER YOU GREAT RICHES IF YOU WILL HELP US.

KANG SEEMED GREATLY EXCITED ABOUT KATH AND ME JOINING HIM TO AT LEAST SPEAK TO HIS PARTNER. WE DID NOT WISH TO RETURN TO THOSE RUINS, BUT I FELT WE WOULD BE BETTER OFF THERE WITH ARMED WARRIORS FOR FRIENDS THAN ALONE HERE IN THIS WASTELAND. ALSO WE MIGHT LEARN FROM THEM HOW WE CAME TO THIS WORLD. WE AGREED.

AH, HE IS HERE ALREADY WITH THE WORKMEN. HE IS EXTREMELY RICH, DEN, AND WE ARE GOING TO OVERTHROW THE EVIL QUEEN.

REVOLT SEEMS QUITE POPULAR HERE.

YOU REFER TO THAT BRAINLESS OUTLAW, GEL. HE IS NO THREAT TO THE QUEEN OR US. HELP US, DEN, AND WE'LL GIVE YOU A FORTUNE. WE MUST FREE THE PEOPLE. WE NOW HAVE TAKEN THESE RUINS OF NEBORC. SOON ALL WILL BE OURS.

WE'RE NOT INTERESTED IN A FORTUNE.

THINK ABOUT IT, DEN. BUT NOW HE AWAITS YOU.

DEN, MEET ARD.

SO YOU ARE THE FAMOUS DEN OF EARTH. IF YOU ARE REALLY AS FIERCE AS THEY SAY, YOU WILL SERVE ME WELL.

WHAT? NOW WAIT A MINUTE, ARD. YOU PRESUME TOO MUCH.

FIRST, A TEST! GUARDS, ***CASTRATE*** THE FREAK!

YOU FIEND!

YAUGH!

HE, HE, HE, HE, HE!

KRAK!

THUD

KA-THAK!

JUST FAIR, DEN. WHY DIDN'T YOU SHOOT THEM?

SHOOT THESE PUPPETS? IT IS YOU--

BLAM!

BLAH!

--WHO DESERVES TO DIE!

HA, HA, HA! I'M GLAD YOU DID THAT. NOW YOU UNDERSTAND FROM THE START THAT YOU CAN'T HARM ME.

IT'S TOO LATE TO TAKE YOUR WOMAN AND RUN. I HAVE ALREADY PUT HER AWAY FOR SAFEKEEPING.

IF YOU EVER WISH TO SEE HER AGAIN, IF YOU WISH TO SEE ANOTHER DAY, YOU WILL SERVE ME.

COME NOW, DEN, IT WILL BE FOR JUST A WHILE, THEN YOU'LL BE FREE AGAIN, AND RICH! DO YOU AGREE?

VERY WELL, ARD. YOU ARE MOST CONVINCING.

UNH!

SNAK

DON'T BE ALARMED. IT IS JUST A FORMALITY.

WELCOME TO THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE ASCENDING FIRE. PRESSURE IS STRONG HERE, BUT THERE ARE REWARDS TOO. I WILL TEND TO YOUR WOUND.

YOUR PRESENCE IS PROVIDENTIAL TO OUR CAUSE. WE KNOW OF A WAY FOR STEALTHY ENTRY TO THE QUEEN'S CASTLE. THE GROWING STORM WILL AID US. SO REST NOW, DEN. TONIGHT WE'LL TAKE THE LOCNAR.

I FOUND MYSELF IN AN INTOLERABLE SITUATION AND THE ONLY MEANS OF RELEASE FOR KATH AND ME WAS TO COOPERATE WITH THESE RUTHLESS FANATICS.

I TRIED TO SLEEP BUT UNEARTHLY VISIONS PLAGUED MY SEMICONSCIOUS STATE. THEY HOVERED ABOUT THESE CURSED RUINS. A MONSTROUS BEING EMERGED FROM THE TRUNCATED PYRAMID AND PERCHED THERE HIDEOUSLY.

THEN THE IMAGES WAVERED AND I AWOKE...I THINK. THERE WAS A LOUD BLAST OF THUNDER AND A COLD GUST OF WIND. STARTLED, I LOOKED AROUND. I SHIVERED AND FORCED MY GAZE TOWARD THE EDIFICE THAT WAS EARLIER THE SCENE OF THE GHASTLY SACRIFICE.

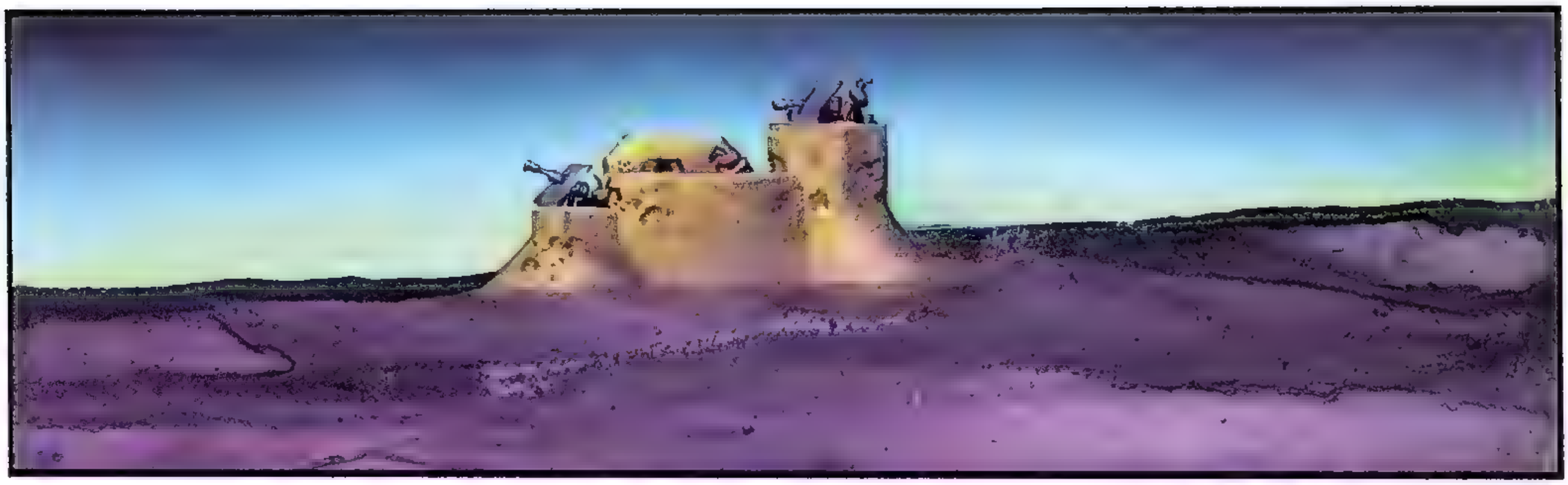
A FLASH OF LIGHTNING REVEALED NO GIANT CREATURE, BUT A TINY FIGURE DANCING MANIACALLY AROUND THE POOL.

I FELT AN INDESCRIBABLE LOATHING FOR THE LITTLE DANCER, THE VAST DECAYED SETTING, EVEN THIS ENTIRE DISTORTED UNIVERSE. I TURNED AWAY, TREMBLING.

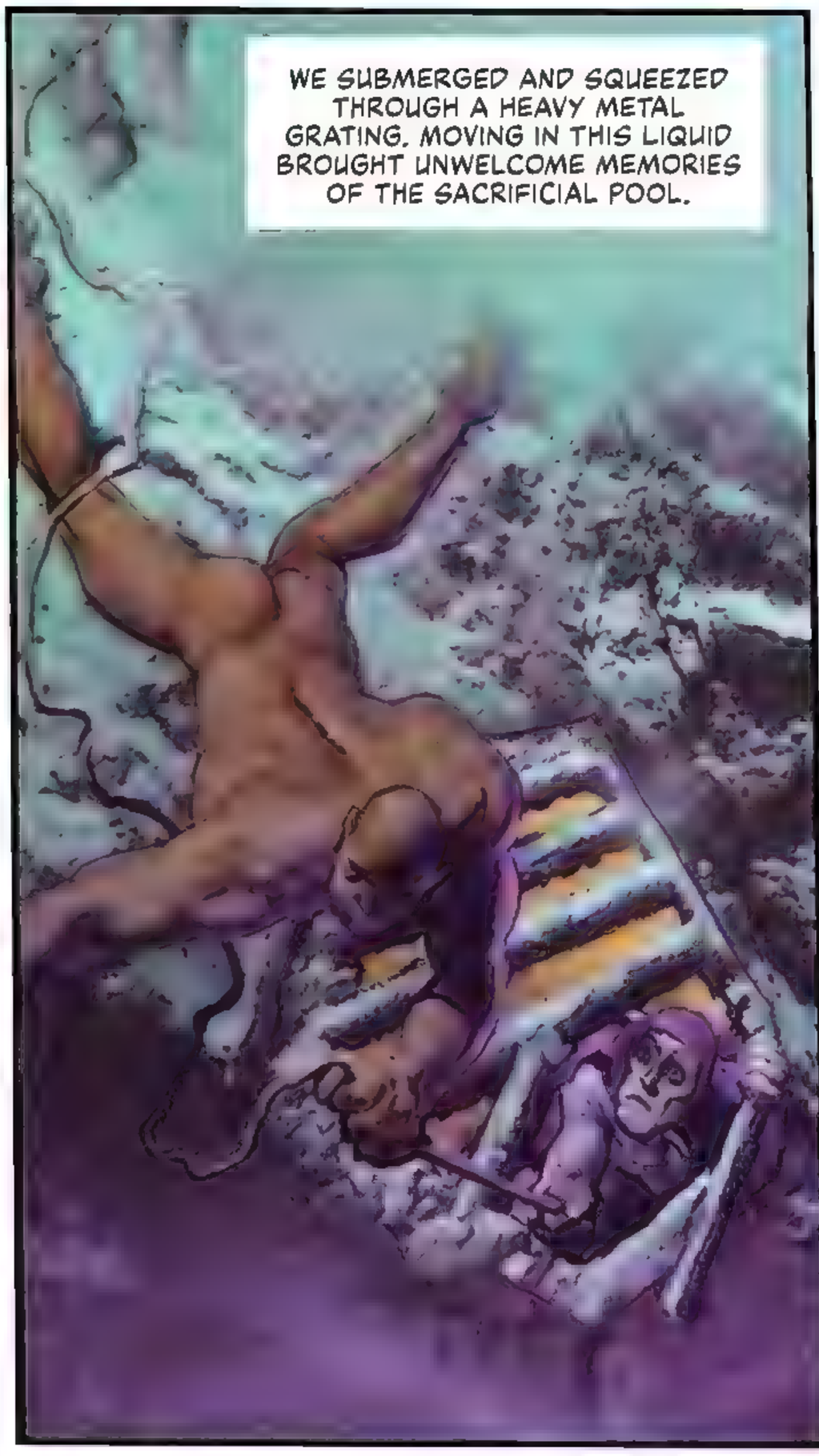
THEN I THOUGHT OF KATH. I CALMED DOWN AND A WARMTH FLOODED OVER ME. I LOVED HER. I WOULD ENDURE ALL FOR HER.

GET UP! WE GO NOW.

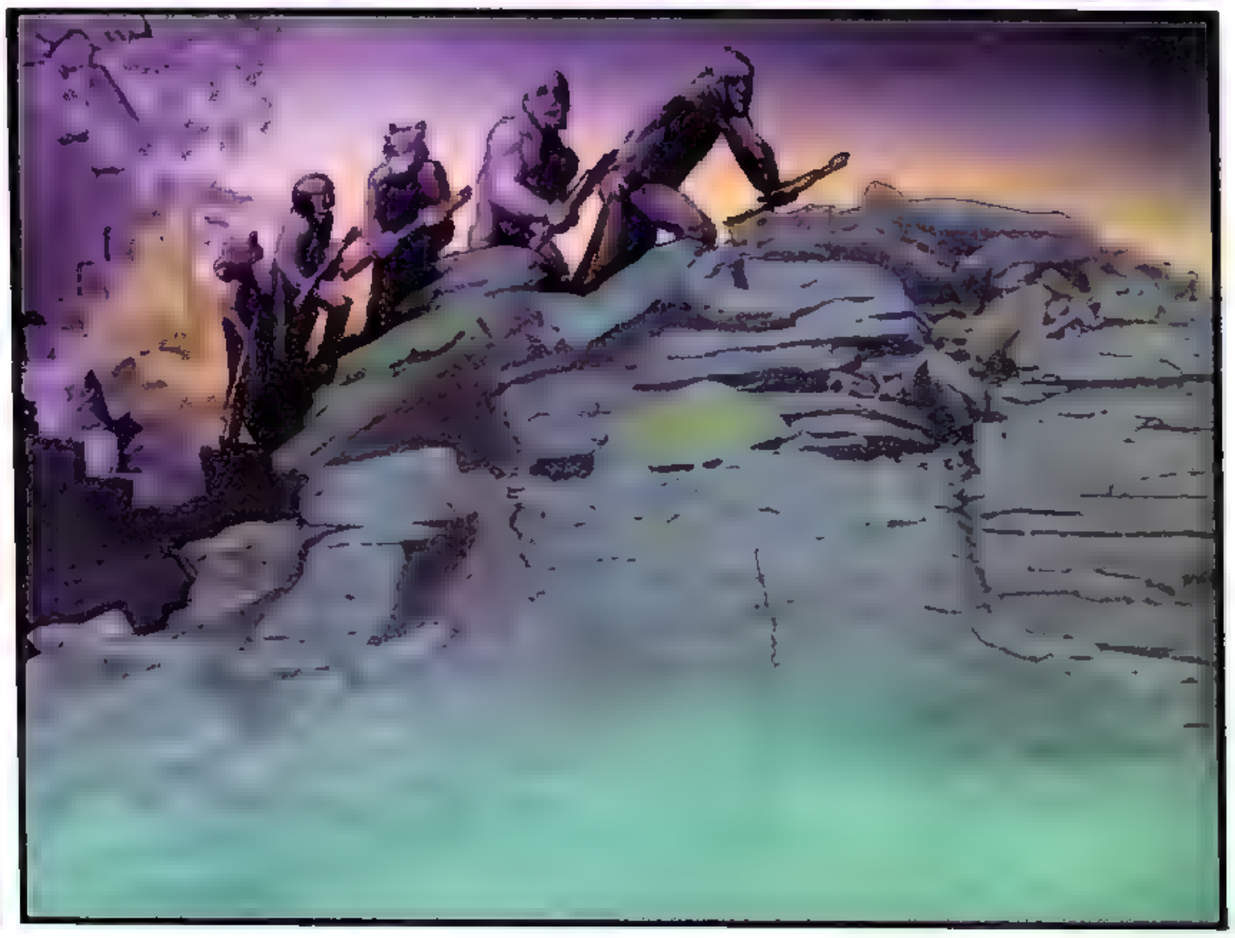
THE FLYING MOUNTS COULD NOT BRAVE THESE WITHERING WINDS. KANG, SIX WARRIORS, AND I MARCHED FOR MORE THAN AN HOUR, THEN THREE PARTED AND PROCEEDED IN A DIFFERENT DIRECTION. WE CONTINUED, SOON REACHING THE BANK OF A DARK RIVER.



FOR A TIME, WE CREPT ALONG A NARROW LEDGE. KANG STOPPED AND LISTENED TO THE HOWLING WIND FOR A FEW MOMENTS.
SILENCE. WE'RE NEAR A BUG GUARD POST. NOW WE GO UNDER.


WE SUBMERGED AND SQUEEZED THROUGH A HEAVY METAL GRATING. MOVING IN THIS LIQUID BROUGHT UNWELCOME MEMORIES OF THE SACRIFICIAL POOL.

WE RESURFACED IN AN UNDERGROUND CHAMBER AND WERE SOON MARCHING AGAIN. WHILE THE STORM RAGED ABOVE, ALL WAS SILENT HERE.



THE PASSAGEWAY SEEMED ENDLESS. IT DESCENDED BELOW THE WATER LEVEL.

WE'RE WALKING BENEATH THE CASTLE MOAT.

AT LAST WE CAME TO STAIRS LEADING OUT OF THAT FOUL PIT.

WHAT A STENCH!

QUIET. I FEAR SOME BEAST PROWLS THESE CATACOMBS.

GROWF

SNAK!

BAM

POOR FELLOW!

LUCKY FELLOW!

GRRRR

THIS WAY!

NOW WE SEPARATE, DEN. NORL WILL GUIDE YOU THROUGH THE HALLS TO THE LOCNAR'S VAULT. I WILL TAKE GART WITHIN THE WALLS AND MEET YOU THERE.

IF I FAIL, YOU WILL TAKE THE LOCNAR, JOIN THE ESCAPE TEAM AT THE RIVER'S SOUTHERN BANK, AND RETURN TO ARD. AND I WILL DO THE SAME.

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UPWARD, EVER UPWARD WE CLIMBED, THROUGH SHADOWED PASSAGEWAYS. WE FREQUENTLY HEARD THE FOOTSTEPS OF GUARDS AND HID UNTIL THE WAY WAS CLEAR AGAIN.

AFTER MORE THAN AN HOUR, WE REACHED A WINDOWED TOWER. THE VIEW AGAIN STIRRED HALF-FORMED MEMORIES.

OVER HERE. WE'RE NEARLY THERE.

I WIPED AWAY THE MENTAL IMAGES. THERE WAS NO TIME NOW FOR REVERIE.

WE WERE SO CLOSE, BUT A GUARD SAT BARRING THE WAY.

I WAS CONSIDERING AN OPEN ATTACK WHEN, STRANGELY, THE GUARD AROSE AND LEFT HIS POST.

ALL WAS DEADLY SILENT. NO FOOTFALLS BETRAYED OUR ENTRY INTO THE INKY BLACKNESS.

THEN WE PAUSED, LETTING OUR EYES BECOME ACCUSTOMED TO THE DARK ROOM. MOMENTARILY THE GLOW OF THE LOCNAR BECAME APPARENT. I FELT A THRILL IN ITS PRESENCE.

WITH MY HANDS IN FRONT OF ME, I MOVED FORWARD. I TOUCHED SOMETHING... WARM FLESH!

THEN THE LIGHTS CAME ON.

HA, HA, HA! GUARDS, KILL THEM!

NORL FOUGHT BRAVELY. FOUR OF THE QUEEN'S SOLDIERS SURROUNDED HIM...

...AND HE WAS FINISHED.

THOUGH I HAD KILLED SIX OR MORE COMBATANTS, MY END WAS NEAR. I WAS GRABBED AND HELD SECURELY. THE CAPTAIN RAISED HIS KNIFE.

BLAM

BLAM

STOP! DON'T KILL HIM!

SOON I FOUND MYSELF WASHED, OILED, AND ALONE WITH THE QUEEN. HER VOICE WAS NO LONGER HARD AND COMMANDING. HER HONEY-COATED WHISPERS HAD A HYPNOTIC EFFECT.

OH DEN, I AM GLAD YOU ARE HERE. I MISTREATED YOU BEFORE. BUT NOW I WANT YOU.

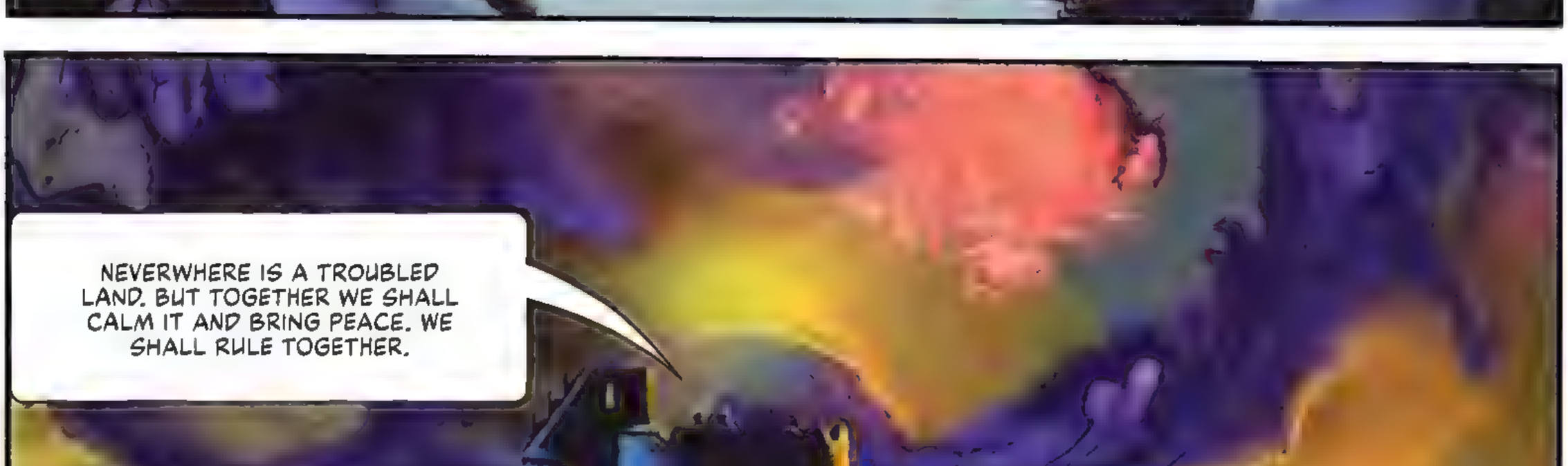
MMMM. OH, I HAVE MISSED YOU...YOUR BODY.

I MUST HAVE YOU... NOW.

UMMMM... AWWWH, AHHH!

WHAT A MAGNIFICENT BEAST YOU HAVE. SO SAVAGE, SO STRONG.

LOOK! THE DAWN CLIMAXES OUR LOVE. IT IS A SIGN, DEN. A NEW DAY, A NEW BEGINNING FOR US.


NEVERWHERE IS A TROUBLED LAND. BUT TOGETHER WE SHALL CALM IT AND BRING PEACE. WE SHALL RULE TOGETHER.

...YOUR MAJESTY!

...YOUR MAJESTY, EXCUSE ME. THERE IS A PROBLEM.

...THE LOCNAR IS MISSING... STOLEN!

FIEND! YOU MAKE LOVE TO ME WHILE YOUR FRIENDS CONTINUE YOUR MISCHIEF!

HOLD HIM! I'M GOING TO KILL THE SNAKE ONCE AND FOR ALL!

YAAUGH!

KRAK

THINGS WERE VIOLENT AGAIN, BUT NOW I SAW A SLIM CHANCE FOR ESCAPE.

UNGH!

THRAK

WHAK!

I THREW THE END OF THE LONG BEDDING OVER THE SIDE AND QUICKLY FOLLOWED.

GIVE ME A SWORD!

SWAK!

KER SPLASH!

DORX, DID YOU FIND ANYTHING?

NO, HE MUST HAVE DROWNED. I GUESS THE SEWER SCAVENGERS WILL TAKE CARE OF HIS CARCASS.

NEVERTHELESS, YOU AND ORD WILL REMAIN AND SEARCH FOR DEN'S BODY. THE QUEEN DEMANDS PROOF OF FLESH.

DAMN! I THOUGHT TODAY I COULD SLEEP.

YES, SIR.

LOOK! IS THAT SOMETHING?

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TRACKS. HEH, HEH, HEH.

DRAW YOUR GUN AND REMAIN MOUNTED, ORD.

WHAT THE--?

AHH!!

BLAM!

WHAMF!

CRUNCH!

THE WAY WAS NOW CLEAR FOR MY RETURN TO THE RUINS. THOUGH I FAILED TO STEAL THE LOCNAR, KANG APPARENTLY SUCCEEDED. ARD WOULD RELEASE KATH, MY LOVE, AND LET US GO IN PEACE.

MY NEW MOUNT CARRIED ME QUICKLY TO MY GOAL. WE WOULD SOON BE FREE. I WAS VERY HAPPY.

SMILING, I WALKED BRISKLY TO ARD'S COURT. EVERYONE THERE WATCHED ME APPROACH. THE AIR CRACKLED WITH TENSION. ARD'S GRIN WAS COLD AS DEATH. SOMETHING WAS WRONG. NEITHER KATH NOR KANG WERE PRESENT.

KANG HAS IT. ISN'T HE HERE?...HE MUST HAVE BEEN DELAYED. HE WILL BE HERE SHORTLY, WITH THE LOCNAR. WON'T YOU FREE KATH NOW?

NO, NO! KANG HAS THE LOCNAR. HE SAID HE WOULD BRING IT BACK HERE. YOU MUST FREE KATH. ***FREE KATH NOW! I DEMAND*** IT! WHERE IS SHE?

WHERE IS THE LOCNAR, DEN? GIVE IT TO ME.

NO, DEN. YOU AGREED TO BRING ME THE LOCNAR. IT SEEMED TO BE A SIMPLE ENOUGH TASK FOR A GREAT ADVENTURER LIKE YOU. YOU SIGNED AN AGREEMENT. I EXPECT YOU TO LIVE UP TO IT.

SHE IS HERE, BUT I WILL NOT FREE HER UNTIL I HAVE THE LOCNAR.

FIEND! YOU'VE KILLED HER.

SHE MERELY SLEEPS. BUT ONLY I CAN AWAKEN HER.

KATH! ...KATH!

"KATH, KATH!" *HEH, HEH, HEH!* ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS BRING ME THE LOCNAR.

...OH, AND ONE OTHER THING, DEN...KANG'S HEAD.

I HAD NO IDEA WHERE TO BEGIN A SEARCH FOR KANG. I COULD NOT APPROACH THE QUEEN'S CASTLE WITHOUT HER INSECT FLIERS ATTACKING. I WAS ON KANG'S MOUNT. I LET HIM GO WHERE HE WOULD. PERHAPS HE COULD FIND HIS MASTER.

DAYS PASSED WHILE I SEARCHED IN VAIN. NEVERWHERE IS A VAST DOMAIN AND I SAW NO ONE I COULD EVEN QUESTION.

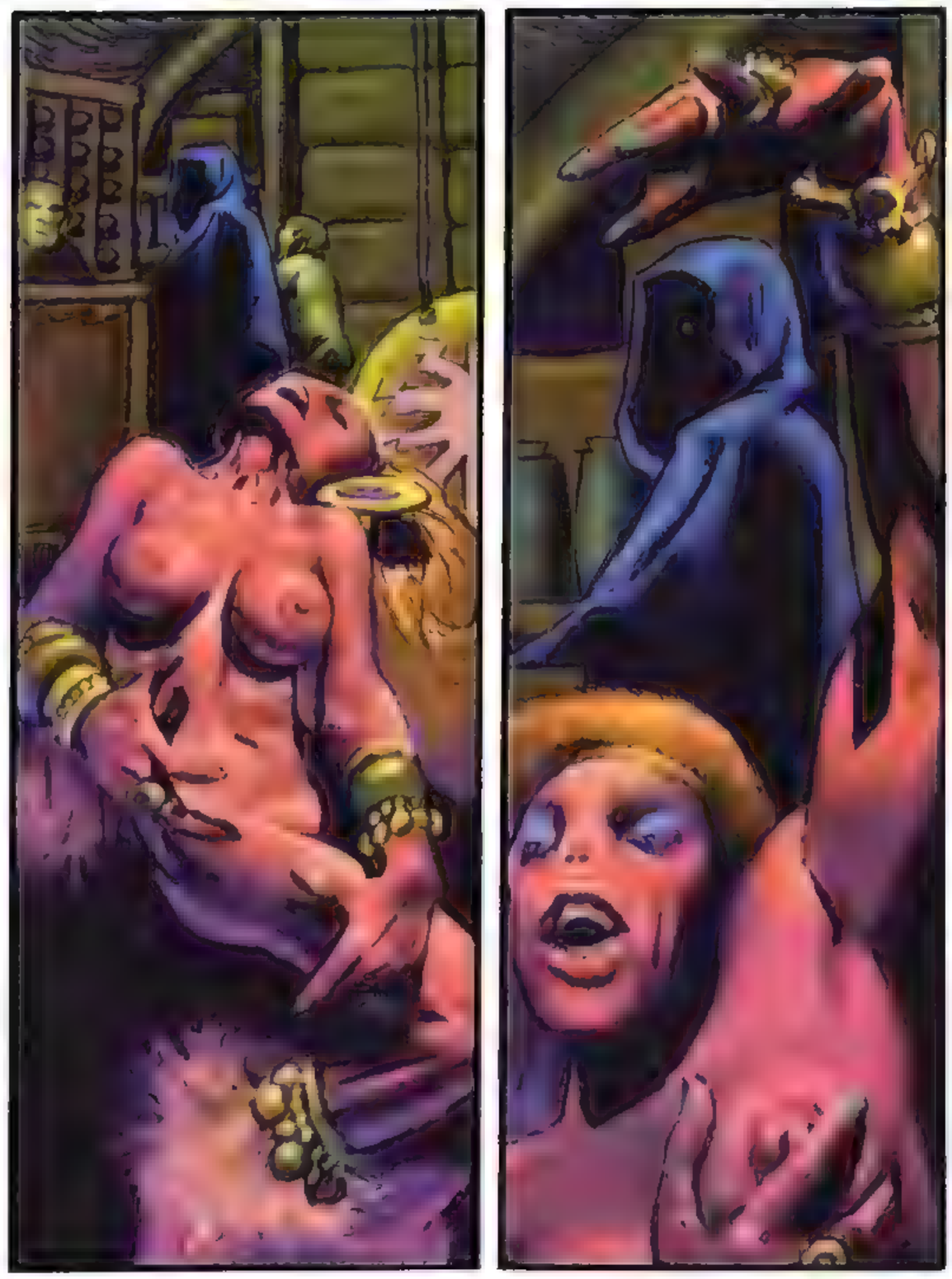
ON THE THIRD DAY, I CAME TO DIFFERENT RUINS. THEY WERE INHABITED BY A CLAN OF SEMIHUMANS WHO HAD BUILT A TOWN ON THE SITE.

I PROCEEDED TO WHAT APPEARED TO BE AN INN, WHERE I TRADED SOME SMALL GAME FOR A MEAL AND A PLACE TO SLEEP.

THESE TOWNSPEOPLE WERE USED TO WANDERERS PASSING THROUGH, YET I HAD THE UNEASY FEELING THAT SOME HAD SEEN ME SOMEWHERE BEFORE. IT WAS CONSTANTLY FRUSTRATING--THE QUEEN, HER MEN, THE REBEL GEL, NOW THESE SUSPICIOUS OAFS--THEY ALL KNEW ME, OR SOMEONE WHO LOOKED LIKE ME. THEY WERE ALL STRANGERS TO ME. THIS VERY WORLD WAS TOTALLY ALIEN TO A BOY FROM KANSAS.

I ABSENTLY DREAMED OF MY OTHER HOME, STARING BLANKLY AT THE NATIVE DANCER. I IGNORED A HOODED FIGURE WATCHING ME INTENTLY.

THE DANCER DID SOME SPECTACULAR MOVEMENTS AND THEN, WITHOUT WARNING, THREW HERSELF UPON ME. I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO. MAYBE IT WAS PART OF THE DANCE.



I FINISHED MY DRINK...

SHE FINISHED HER DANCE...

...AND THINGS STARTED TO GET FUZZY.

HEY YOU, *FELLA...* *SSHTOP SSSTARING* AT ME, SSSHEE!

THROW THAT DRUNK OUT.

HEY, WAASSSH IT...

TH-BLUMP

I LOST CONSCIOUSNESS FOR A WHILE, THEN, IN A DREAM, I SAW MY UNCLE DAN FROM MY OTHER LIFE. SOMETHING WAS HAPPENING TO HIM. HIS APPEARANCE CHANGED AS HE TRAVELED INTO ANOTHER UNIVERSE.

HE FOUGHT GEL...

...SAVED THE QUEEN...

...MADE LOVE TO HER...

...AND WAS KILLED.

WAKE UP, DEN.

KANG!

WHY DIDN'T YOU RETURN TO ARD? WHY DIDN'T YOU GIVE HIM THE LOCNAR?

WHY, YOU IMPUDENT DUPE. ARD HAS TRICKED YOU. HE'S GOT THE MAGIC SCEPTER. I GAVE IT TO HIM.

HE NOW SEEKS TO BE RID OF US BY HAVING US KILL EACH OTHER.

WE CAN BEAT HIM BY JOINING FORCES. I HAVE A PLAN. I--

ENOUGH!

SNAP

KRAK!

THUD
AARGHH!
THUMP
UNH!

KLAK
WHAP!
KRAK!
UNK!

OOF!

WHUD!

AOOW!!

KRAK!

I'M TIRED OF BEING EVERYONE'S FOOL!

WHAT IF HE'S TELLING THE TRUTH?

KATH, WHAT SHALL I DO?

SORRY, DEN. I NEED THE LOCNAR.

OH DARK FORCES, HEARKEN TO MY COMMAND! THROUGH THIS DEMON SCEPTER, SEND MY VOICE TO THE NECROMANCER ARD.

I LEFT MUGOOR THE PRIMITIVE SETTLEMENT AND RETURNED TO WHERE I HAD LEFT KANG'S FLIER. I WAS IN A STATE OF OVERPOWERING ANXIETY AND EMOTIONAL TURMOIL. I PACED FOR A WHILE.

SUDDENLY A FIERCE WIND SPRUNG UP, BLOWING DUST IN MY EYES. I WAS STARTLED BY AN EARSPLITTING CLAP OF THUNDER. I SAW SOMEONE.

WHO ARE YOU?

I AM THE ONE UPON WHOM YOU CALLED.

YOU MUST DECIDE YOUR OWN COURSE OF ACTION. I CAN ADVISE YOU ABOUT ONLY ONE THING. DO NOT TRUST ARD. DO NOT TRUST KANG. DO NOT TRUST GEL NOR THE QUEEN.

UNCLE DAN, HELP ME! HOW CAN I SAVE KATH?

UNCLE DAN! ...ER...DEN!

I MUST GO NOW.

CAUTION, DEN...

...THERE IS AN ENEMY NEAR.

GAAUGH!

GEL!

WHIP

WWHHIRRRR

THUMPH!

SURRENDER!

YAAAUGH!

THROK!

KRAK!

KRUCH!

REST IN PEACE, GEL.

IT IS A SHAME. IT SEEMS SOME PEOPLE BLUNDER THEIR LIVES AWAY.

NARROWLY ESCAPING DISASTER, THEY WANDER IN A DAZE FROM CRISIS TO CRISIS. DO THEY CARE NOTHING FOR THEIR OWN BEST INTERESTS?

THEY CAN'T BE HELPED. I KNOW. I'VE TRIED. WHAT WAS THE THANKS I GOT? **TREACHERY!**

...AND STILL THEY RETURN EXPECTING FORGIVENESS.

I HAVE ULTIMATELY SUPREME GOALS MYSELF. BUT UNLIKE SOME WOULD-BE HEROES, I PLAN MY LIFE WITH COLD, MECHANICAL LOGIC. EVERY DECISION IS WEIGHED CAREFULLY AGAINST POSSIBLE--

ARD! ENOUGH OF YOUR LECTURE. I'VE GOT THE LOCNAR. WILL YOU BARGAIN?

ALL IN DUE TIME, KANG. I GUESS MY WORST FAULT IS THAT EVEN AFTER I HAVE BEEN CHEATED, HURT SEVERELY, I STILL WELCOME MY FORMER FRIENDS WITH AN OPEN HEART.

FOR GOD'S SAKE, RETURN MY FAMILY TO ME AND THE LOCNAR IS YOURS.

NOT SO FAST! THESE THINGS MUST BE DONE DELICATELY SO AS NOT TO DISTURB THE SUPERNORMAL ATMOSPHERES.

I TRUSTED YOU, KANG, AND YOU CHEATED ME...SO NOW BEFORE THIS EXCHANGE CAN BE MADE...YOU MUST TRUST ME.

GIVE ME THE LOCNAR NOW.

AAAAAAAAAAHH! HAH, HAH, HAH, HAH, HAH, HAH, NERVOUS, KANG?

BRON, JOPO, SET HIS MIND AT EASE. BRING OUT HIS LOVED ONES.

YANDORA! KRON!

KANG!

I JUST LOVE REUNIONS. ALL WILL BE FORGIVEN, KANG, IF YOU'LL DO JUST ONE OTHER LITTLE THING FOR ME.

I WILL USE KATH FOR THE SACRIFICE, BUT DEN IS BOUND TO MAKE A NUISANCE OF HIMSELF. KILL HIM, KANG.

NO! WE'RE QUITS, NOW AND FOREVER!

I KNEW YOU WOULD BETRAY ME AGAIN.

AAAAAAAAHH!

THUNK!

SHALL WE PURSUE, SIRE?

SPUK

AT A PACE, HE WON'T GO FAR.

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAUUUUUUUUUGH!

THAT'S KANG! WHAT HAPPENED?

WHERE IS HE?

LOOK! THERE'S SOMETHING OVER THERE.

IT'S HIM! GREAT CTHULU'S GHOST!

WHAT MAGIC IS THIS?

KANG'S FAMILY, THEY'RE...

KILL ME! KILL ME, I BEG OF YOU. EACH MOMENT I YET LIVE IS AGONY.

YOUR WISH...

IS...

MY...

COMMAND.

K-KRAK

SOON, VERY SOON, THE INCREDIBLE POWERS OF THE UNIVERSE WILL BE AT MY COMMAND. I THINK I SHOULD PREPARE KATH.

YOU TWO SEEK OUT DEN. HE'S PROBABLY SNEAKING AROUND HERE SOMEWHERE. KILL HIM.

HEH, HEH, HEH!
SOON, VERY SOON.

AAAH! THE SLEEPING BEAUTY.

NOW, KATH, I, ARD, BID YOU... AWAKEN!

DEN!...OH DEN, WHERE ARE YOU?

HOW CAN YOU SPEAK THE NAME OF THAT WORTHLESS PAWN WHEN YOU ARE PRESENTED WITH THE MAGNIFICENT ARD?

YOUR AND DEN'S TIME IS RUNNING OUT. FOR SOME CONSIDERATION I CAN SEE TO IT THAT YOUR LAST MOMENTS ARE SPENT TOGETHER.

THUUMMMMM

THUUMMMMM

THUUMMMMM

THUUMMMMM

OUT OF THE BLACK, ABYSMAL DEPTHS IT CAME, FLOWING, PULSING INEXORABLY UPWARD. ITS UNCANNY SENSES HEARD THE CALL YET TO BE UTTERED.

CAN YOU HEAR IT? IT'S GETTING LOUDER. I'VE HEARD IT FOR WEEKS NOW. IT IS A PREMONITION OF MY CATACLYSMIC ASCENSION.

HIGHER THROUGH THE VASTLY TUNNELED SUBSTRUCTURE OF THIS WORLD, IT SWAM. FOR TIMELESS EONS, THIS GOD SLEPT. NOW IT CAME FORTH TO DESTROY THE SOURCE OF ITS DISTURBANCE.

MY GOD, THOSE WINDS ARE GETTING FIERCE!

COME, LET'S SCOUT THE PERIMETER. IF DEN IS NEAR, WE'LL CATCH HIM.

YOU GO AROUND THE LEFT. I'LL TAKE THE RIGHT AND WE'LL REJOIN ON THE EAST SIDE.

AND DON'T TRY TO TAKE HIM ALIVE...JUST SHOOT!

THUUUUMMMMMMMM

THUUUUMMMMMMMM

©1977 RICHARD V. CORBEN

UNGH!

HAH, HAH!

THUMPH!

QUICKLY, IF YOU VALUE YOUR LIFE, WHERE IS KATH HELD?

STOP! MOVE AWAY FROM HIM, DEN.

KLIC KLAK

ARD WILL BE MOST APPRECIATIVE OF THE TROPHY I WILL BRING TO HIM.

BLAM!

FLUMP!

I KNEW WE WOULD MEET IF I CAME AFTER YOU MYSELF. COME CLOSER... A KISS BEFORE YOU DIE.

THUMMM

BITCH! FOUL SLUT! YOU'VE FAILED TO EVEN AROUSE ME! YOU AND DEN SHALL DIE ALONE!

SLAP SLAP!

NO, NO. AOWWW!

I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER. ALL MORTALS FAIL ME. THEY'RE SO WEAK AND PUNY.

SLAP!

THUMMM

WAIT! LET ME TRY AGAIN!

GET YOUR FILTHY HANDS OFF ME.

I WILL BE LORD OF THE UNIVERSE AND ONLY THEN WILL I KNOW SATISFACTION. GUARDS, TAKE HER AND FOLLOW ME.

DEN, DEN!

THUMMM

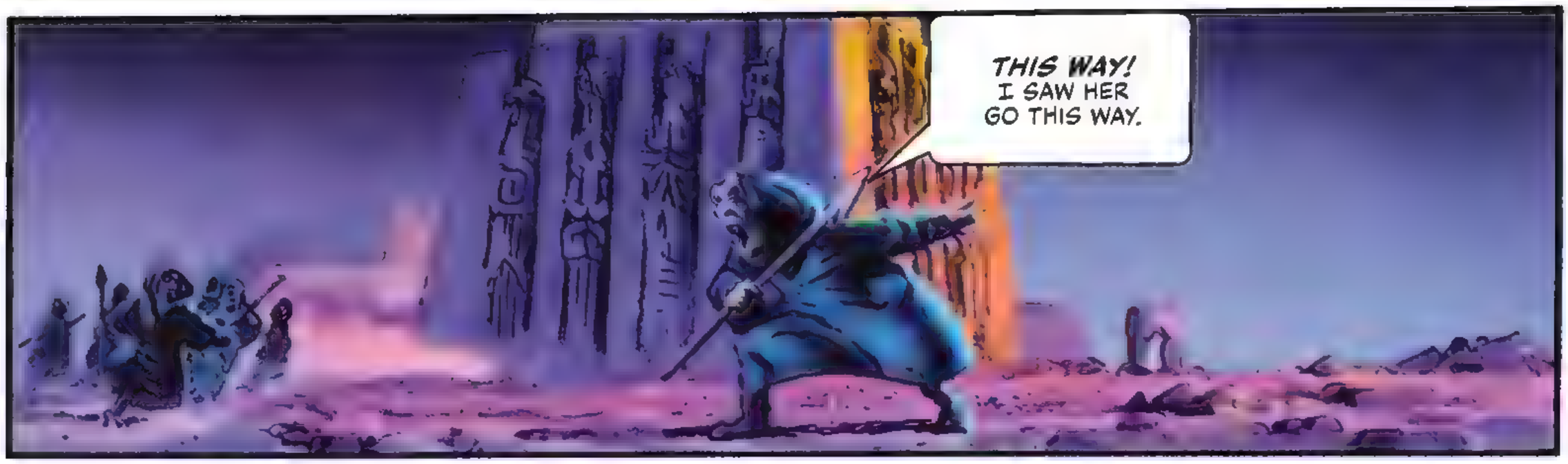
FOOLS! AFTER HER!

CRASH!

HAH! WE'VE GOT HER CORNERED NOW.

GET HER! GET HER OR YOU WILL ALL DIE.

WHUMCH!


THIS WAY!
I SAW HER
GO THIS WAY.

BY THE POWERS OF THIS MAGIC SCEPTER, I SEND TO THE CORE OF ALL SPACE AND TIME A CALL.

THUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUMMMMMMMMMMMMMM~

COME FORTH, MIGHTY ULUHTC. ONE WHO WOULD BE YOUR MASTER BECKONS YOU.

YOU WILL GRANT ME ALL YOUR STRENGTH AND BE MY SLAVE FOR A LIVING MORTAL SACRIFICE. YOU ARE BOUND TO DO SO. IT HAS BEEN ORDAINED FROM THE VERY BEGINNING.

BUBBLE BUBBLE GURGLE

THUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

COME FORTH, ULUHTC. *I DEMAND IT. ULUHTC, ULUHTC, ULUHTC!*

COME, ULUHTC. YOUR MORTAL SACRIFICE AWAITS YOU.

THUUUMMMMMM THUUMMMMMM THUUU

G-GREAT ULUHTC, H-HERE IS YOUR SACRIFICE.

BRING KATH FORWARD AND THROW HER.

©1977 RICHARD CORBEN

DEN!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING? NO, NO! DEN...

STOP! YOU'RE RUINING EVERYTHING.

I'LL KILL YOU WITH A BLAST OF THE LOCNAR'S ENERGY.

WHAT THE--

GIVE ME THAT, YOU!

UNH! NO!

THE LOCNAR IS MINE!

AAAAAHH!

RRRUMBLE!

YAAAAAAAAAA

KRATAK BRUMMMMMMMMBLE!

OH, IT'S SPLITTING THE VERY EARTH.

RRRRRRRRRRRRR

IS THIS THE END, DEN? ARE WE DOOMED?

ONE LAST HOPE...

RETURN TO HELL, DEVIL!

OOH. I CAN'T SEE. WHAT HAPPENED?

THAT EXPLOSION WAS BEYOND UNDERSTANDING. MY EARS ARE RINGING.

WAS THE MONSTER KILLED?

I'M NOT SURE IT CAN BE KILLED...NOR ARD EITHER. BUT THEY'RE GONE FROM THIS WORLD.

WHAT ABOUT THE QUEEN?

SHE IS PROBABLY DEAD.

WE ARE ALIVE AND WELL. THAT'S ALL I CARE ABOUT FOR NOW.

I THOUGHT I SAW HER MOUNT A FLIER.

the end
RON GREEN

I'M TRULY HAPPY DEN, MORE THAN I COULD'VE IMAGINED.

WE ARE MOST FORTUNATE. IT IS ALMOST PERFECT.

ALMOST PERFECT? HOW COULD IT POSSIBLY BE BETTER? IS THERE SOME POSITION WE HAVEN'T TRIED?

HA, HA, HA, HA! NOT THAT. YOU'RE WONDERFUL.

IT'S JUST THAT...I KNOW HOW WE CAME TO NEVERWHERE, BUT MY UNCLE'S FATE IS STILL A MYSTERY.

WILL WE EVER DISCOVER THE TRUTH?

UNCLE DAN'S SPIRIT IS NOT AT REST. I THINK HE WAS MURDERED.

LOOK!

AN ENCAMPMENT...WHAT? I BELIEVE THAT IS THE VERY SPOT WHERE I ARRIVED IN THIS WORLD. LET'S GET CLOSER.

OH, PLEASE UNDERSTAND, YOUR MAJESTY. THOUGH I HAVE STUDIED THE PROBLEM FROM EVERY APPROACH, AND I HAVE GATHERED THE REQUIRED MAGICAL ELEMENTS, THE SIGNS POINT TO FAILURE.

FOOL! YOU SAID YOU ARE A GREAT WIZARD. YOU'RE NOTHING!

DID YOU THINK I WAS TOO SIMPLE TO SEPARATE THE HALF-TRUTHS FROM YOUR TRANSPARENT FABRICATIONS? I AM MORE VERSED IN THE DARK ARTS THAN YOU.

YOU SNIVELING TWIT! AT LEAST YOU COLLECTED THE RARE STONES AND GASSES. BUT I REALIZE THE MISSING ELEMENT IS ***TIME!*** THE CATACLYSMIC DESTRUCTION OF THE LOCNAR SET BACK MORE THAN MY PROMOTION TO POWER...

...IT RESET THE GEOLOGIC-COSMIC RELATIONSHIP. THANKS TO INTERFERING UPSTARTS, I MUST WAIT FOUR SEASONAL CYCLES FOR THE FORCES TO COME INTO PRECISE ALIGNMENT. THEN I WILL CREATE LOCNAR'S BROTHER.

ZEK, YOU ***FOOL!*** I KNOW YOU WERE GOING TO SABOTAGE MY PLANS!

FEED HIM TO THE GULPER.

NOOOO! NO, PLEASE!

YAAAAAA!

AAAARRR ROOWW!

HEY, COME BACK HERE! GULPER'S HUNGRY!

AAAIEEE!

CRACK!

HERE FELLOW, GO WITH KATH!

THUD! BUDK!

QUICK! SURROUND HIM!

SMAK!

WHAP!

K-KRIK

NOW WE'VE GOT HIM. *PULL!*

NO! THEY'VE CAPTURED DEN.

DEN, DEN, DEN! YOU'LL NEVER LEARN. WHAT AM I GOING TO DO WITH YOU?

YOU'LL GET NOTHING FROM ME THIS TIME.

OH, REALLY?

YOU CAN NEVER REFUSE ME, DEN. JUST AS I CAN NEVER REFUSE YOU. I'LL PROVE NOW THAT YOU'LL GIVE ME WHAT I WANT...EVEN WITH A JEERING AUDIENCE.

TIE HIM WELL.

RESIST ME, IF YOU CAN.

STILL COOL? LET'S SEE IF THIS LITTLE BOOGER REMEMBERS ME.

KATH, KATH, KATH...

KATH!

SHREEEK!

OH,
:COUGH, COUGH:
DEN, I'M FALLING!

I FEAR YOU'LL LIVE TO REGRET LETTING THE QUEEN LIVE.

IT IS AGAINST OUR NATURE TO KILL WHEN IT IS NOT NECESSARY. BESIDES, ZEK, SHE SAVED DEN EARLIER.

NEVERTHELESS, I SUGGEST YOU LEAVE THIS LAND FAR BEHIND.

BECAUSE IN FOUR YEARS NEVERWHERE WILL BE HERS COMPLETELY. THEN SHE'LL COME AFTER YOU AGAIN.

HA, HA, HA, HA, HA, HA! ***I PROVED IT!***

WE'VE GOT FOUR YEARS...THEN PERHAPS ANOTHER ADVENTURE.

FIRST EDITION FOREWORD

FRITZ LEIBER

The art traditions which Richard Corben drew on in creating this remarkable book go back 30,000 years and more—to Late Paleolithic man's cave paintings of hunters and their weapons, witch doctors and their rituals, and a profusion of animals feared and revered: the mammoth and the aurochs, the reindeer, wild horse, bison, rhinoceros, and elephant, and, perhaps by way of dimly recalled racial experience, the sabertooth tiger, the dire wolf, the dragon, and kindred monsters. The dry caves sought out by the artists of the Aurignacian and Solutrean culture preserved their vivid work from sun, damp, wind, and weathering and many of their techniques were curiously modern—big, posterish expanses of color, dramatic stick figures, the effect of airbrush gotten by blowing through hollow bones to break up paint fed through a similar tube into a fine spray.

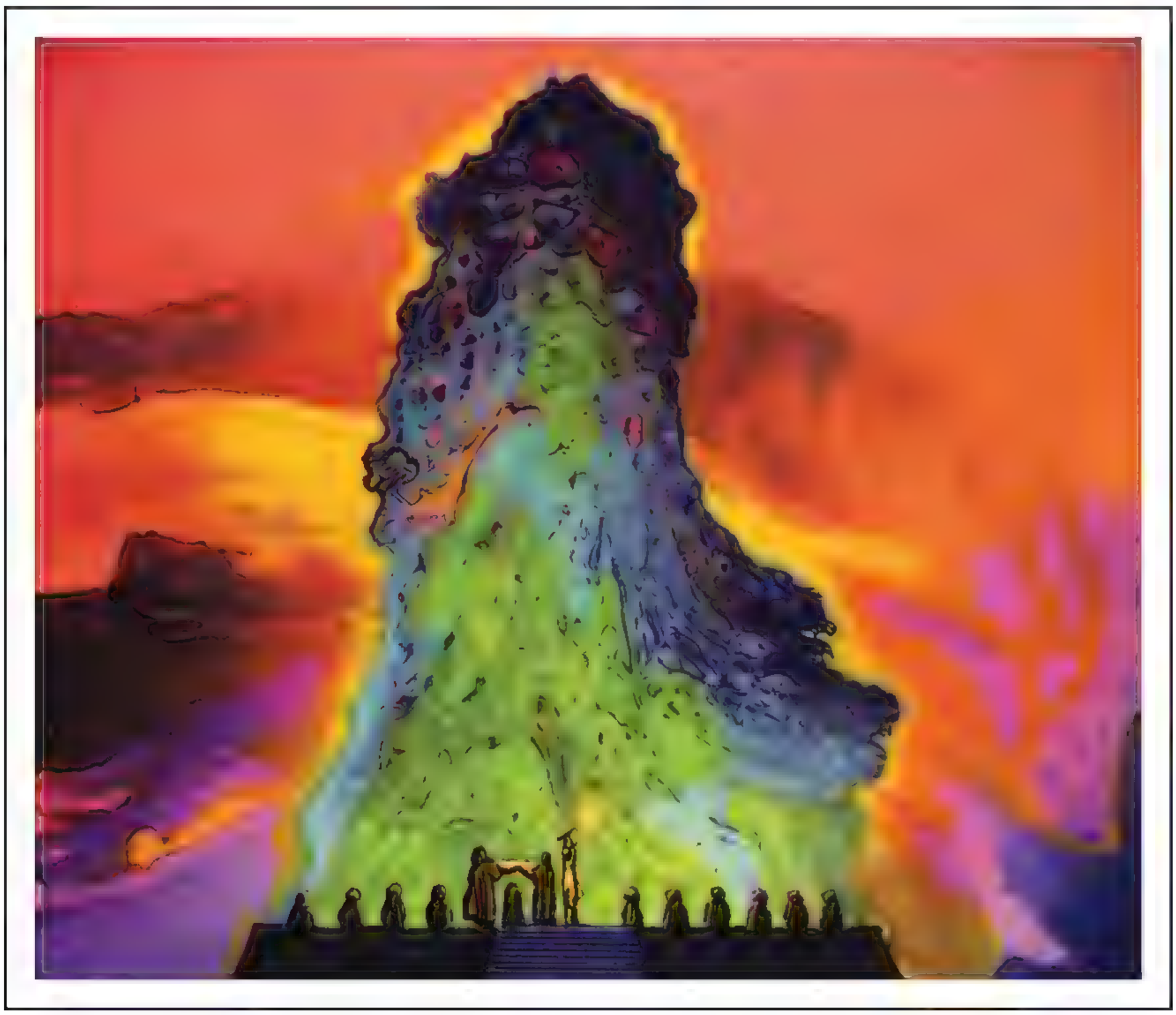
Correspondingly, Richard Corben reaches far back into time for his fundamentals: a great desert landscape in cave browns and reds and in it the single figure of a powerful naked man—one more statuesque and entirely natural animal, but a brooding one, imaginative and feelingful and lonely, wondering about the mystery of his existence. To him come other primitives: A mysterious woman-girl with exotic headdress and facial stripings (the use of body paint is another odd link between ancient and contemporary); the beast-man (primitives often guised themselves as their totem animal, both hunted and worshiped); and then the trek begins,

whipped on by curiosity (the mythological theme of spying on the naked goddess is a common one), toward the arena of the story set amongst temple ruins suggestive of the Incan, Aztec, and mysterious Mayan—the whole wealth of archaeology and anthropology is at the artist's fingertips. Thereafter bursts of action savage, dramatic, and humorous; more animal men, magical women, stranger monsters; then escape and the weaving into the tale of its science fiction and occult elements, that notion of interdimensional doorways between worlds, which haunts the imaginations of fantasy writers, speculative scientists, and mystics alike.

All art, it seems to me, goes back to the dramatic, the acted-out tale, the creation of scenes, the weaving together of words and pictures, to tell a story. The comic adventure, the action tale told in brief words and pictures, has a long history, for the reader is always happiest if he can see as well as read. Illuminations in gilts and silvers, purest blues and reds, flower from the crabbed texts of medieval manuscripts out onto the vellum margins, as though the black letter words cried out for pictures and thus brought them into being.

Yes, man has always had the need to visualize a story so as to make it all the more palpable. Neverwhere, a graphic story, has all the sophisticated techniques of modern art to bring a wonderful, new pictorial tale to an age-old tradition.

Fritz Leiber
San Francisco, 1977



THE ART OF RICHARD CORBEN

BRUCE JONES

You are about to embark on a singularly unique and highly personal visual journey; a journey you're not likely to encounter outside the pages of this book. A journey through the corridors of the gifted, chaotic, always tumultuously exciting mind of Richard Corben.

That the trip is pictorially stunning is apparent at even a glance through these pages, with panel after panel shot through with coruscating colors and seething vitality. And if Corben had nothing more than his virtuoso drawing and chromatic skill to offer us, that would be enough. But *Neverwhere* is far more than a brilliantly illustrated graphic fantasy; it is, quite possibly, the author's most daring and distinctively conceived work to date. It is truly a legacy of Richard Corben himself, a hotline to his subconscious, and we are the richer for his power to conjure it.

The major advantage *Neverwhere* has over other forms of the graphic story is the climate of freedom in which it was created. Never a "deadline project," *Neverwhere* flowered under Corben's personal guidelines and total editorial control. As such, it is less a structured, formally conceived novel than a freewheeling pictorial odyssey, inhabited and governed by the artist's natural instincts, untethered by traditional comic format or publishing credo.

Indeed, *Neverwhere*'s gestation had its roots in a different medium altogether, that of film. Den, the hairless, pumped-muscled protagonist, made his debut as a movie hero, and a living one at that. Even the film itself began as an unstructured special-effects exercise in the artist's mind. "I was working for Calvin Productions at the time," says Corben, referring to a film studio in Kansas City that deals in product animation. "I had this visual concept of a live actor transforming into an animated drawing before the viewer's eyes. The idea fascinated me. I really wrote the entire *Neverwhere* film around that one scene." Thus the cinematic influence in *Neverwhere* the graphic novel is hardly surprising. According to Corben, "the comic story is actually a sequel

to the film. Really, there is only a tenuous relationship between the two: the comic version is complete in itself."

Completed over a year's time, the thirty-minute film is as lineally awesome as the comic story is volumetrically. The entire animated segment (constituting the bulk of the film) was hand drawn by Corben on tracing paper in his spare time and in after-hour sessions at Calvin. "I did it on tracing paper to eliminate cel expense. Also, I could have total artistic control because it's my drawing you see in the film, not some assembly-line cel painter." Although completed with Calvin's technical help, it was not until Corben was months into the project that they took notice of what was burgeoning beneath their noses and offered to assist in the monumental undertaking.

"Most of the work we were doing at Calvin was so dull it would put you to sleep," says Corben. "Naturally all the directors there saw themselves on a Hollywood set, filming the Bible. I guess they saw a kindred spirit in this poor young artist trying to do an animated film by himself. They pulled whatever strings they could to see that it got produced, using the excuse of calling it a workshop project or whatever. I had recorded the sound on homemade equipment after all the animation was completed and the live action finished. The directors saw it, were impressed, and said 'Let's do something with it.' They started editing it with the track I'd done and we ran an interlock, saw it was awful, and began redubbing with new voices. In the end, I think Calvin spent more money on it than they wanted to."

The film *Neverwhere* was sent to the Council of International Nontheatrical Events and was entered in the Japanese Film Festival, where it garnered an award. It went on to win two other awards for its young creator, Richard Corben. "I need both film and art in my life. I can't separate the two. But there's an illustrative quality to drawing you simply can't get in an animated film and that's why *Neverwhere* evolved into the comic format."

Like the film, the *Neverwhere* graphic story is a random spiraling of effect techniques and visual styles. Unencumbered with thoughts of audience reaction, impervious to editorial scissoring, Corben glides in and out not only of storytelling content, but of application and choice of artistic media as well! One moment the page is awash with mushrooming, photographic clouds and chiseled edifices so real they must be tangible—the next moment Katherine's abundant charms have softened from Daliesque surreality to chalky slashes of painterly abandon.

Corben refers to this whole incredible evolvement as "sloppiness." "I did the thing piecemeal—out of chronological order. One chapter would precede another by months, and then I was into another style." The end result is a fresh, boundless wedding of concepts and moods that enlivens every page with spontaneity and avoids the redundancy one might expect from a ninety-eight-page pictorial novel.

It is *Neverwhere*'s attention to the basics of storytelling, however, that makes it so arresting. Den may be impossibly powerful and athletic—even grotesquely so—yet he is really you and me,

as is Katherine. The greater the disproportion, the more readily we identify. Corben himself is hardly immune: "How much of Den is me? Well, I guess he does have my personality, He is one part of my fantasy world. Certainly I relate to him more than the things I've done for the comics." As for the character's physical attributes: "It's part of the stylization—a simpler form artistically. Every man sometimes thinks of himself as being the center of the universe in some way.

"I want to get totally involved in my stories, in the world I'm creating. I am only successful if the reader also gets involved—though obviously not to the extent that I am. I remember that at times during the drawing of *Neverwhere* I could hardly wait to get out of bed in the morning and to the drawing board."

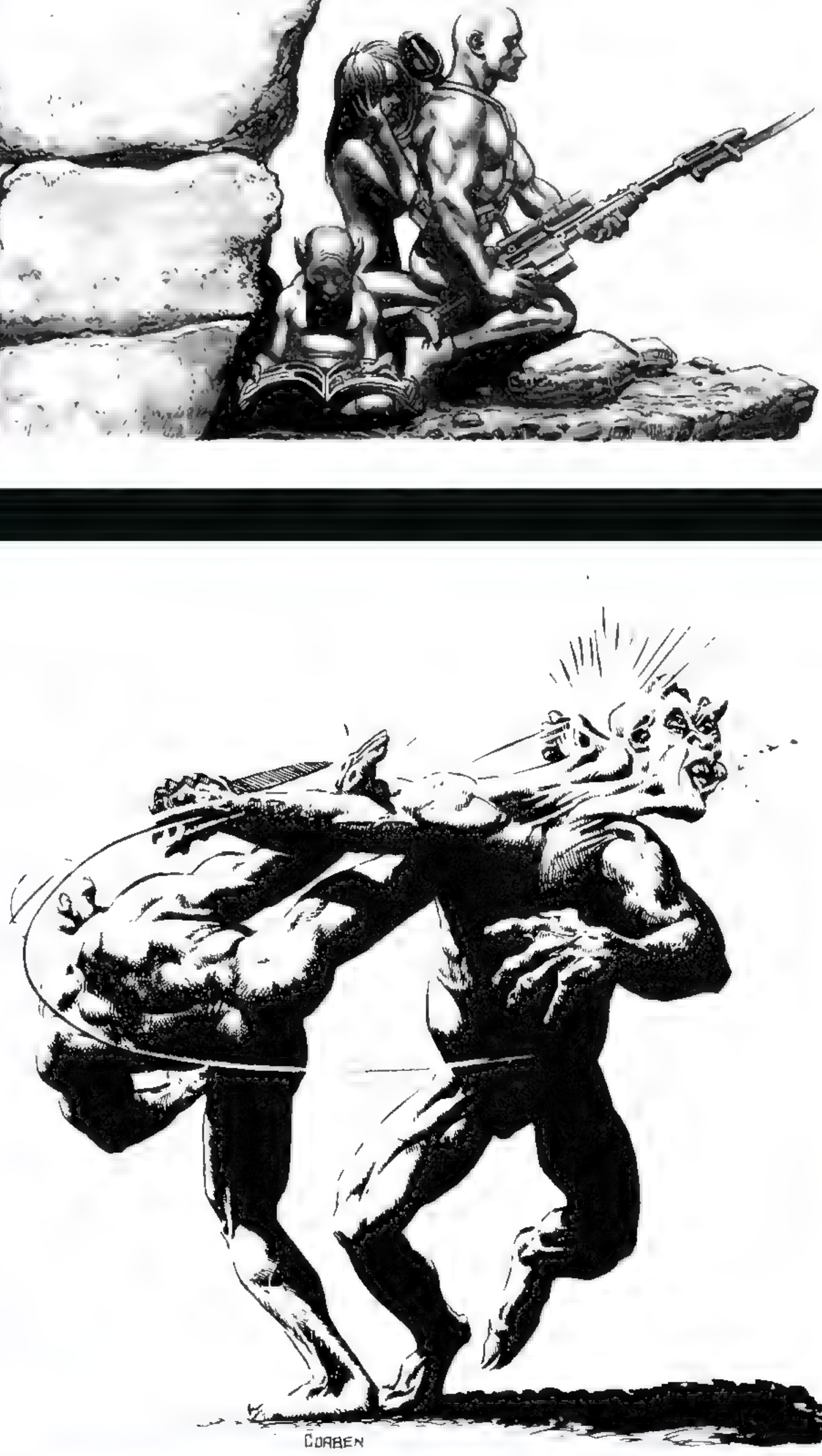
Perhaps, in the end, that is what makes *Neverwhere* so highly readable: that Richard Corben enjoyed participating in it as much as a spectator as an artist. Certainly the art exists for its own sake: it may be garish, violent, even melodramatic, but it is only meeting the demands such an outlandish, exotic world places on itself. It's a world unconcerned with our own, even as Corben is unconcerned with our approval of it . . .

"I never think about my popularity or lack of it. I just love to draw. I spent a lot of time drawing as a kid, it was undoubtedly a big factor in my development. There's a preschool age that is crucial to one's future development as an artist. The more one draws at this time, I believe, the better his chances for proficiency in the future. All kids do it, some just more than others. I drew every day, all hours, every chance I got, until I ran out of either paper or pencils.

"What's important to me is doing what I want the way I want to do it. But ego doesn't motivate me to work at all. I really don't care if I'm remembered or not."

And it's for this very reason, of course, that Richard Corben *will* be remembered, As will *Neverwhere*.

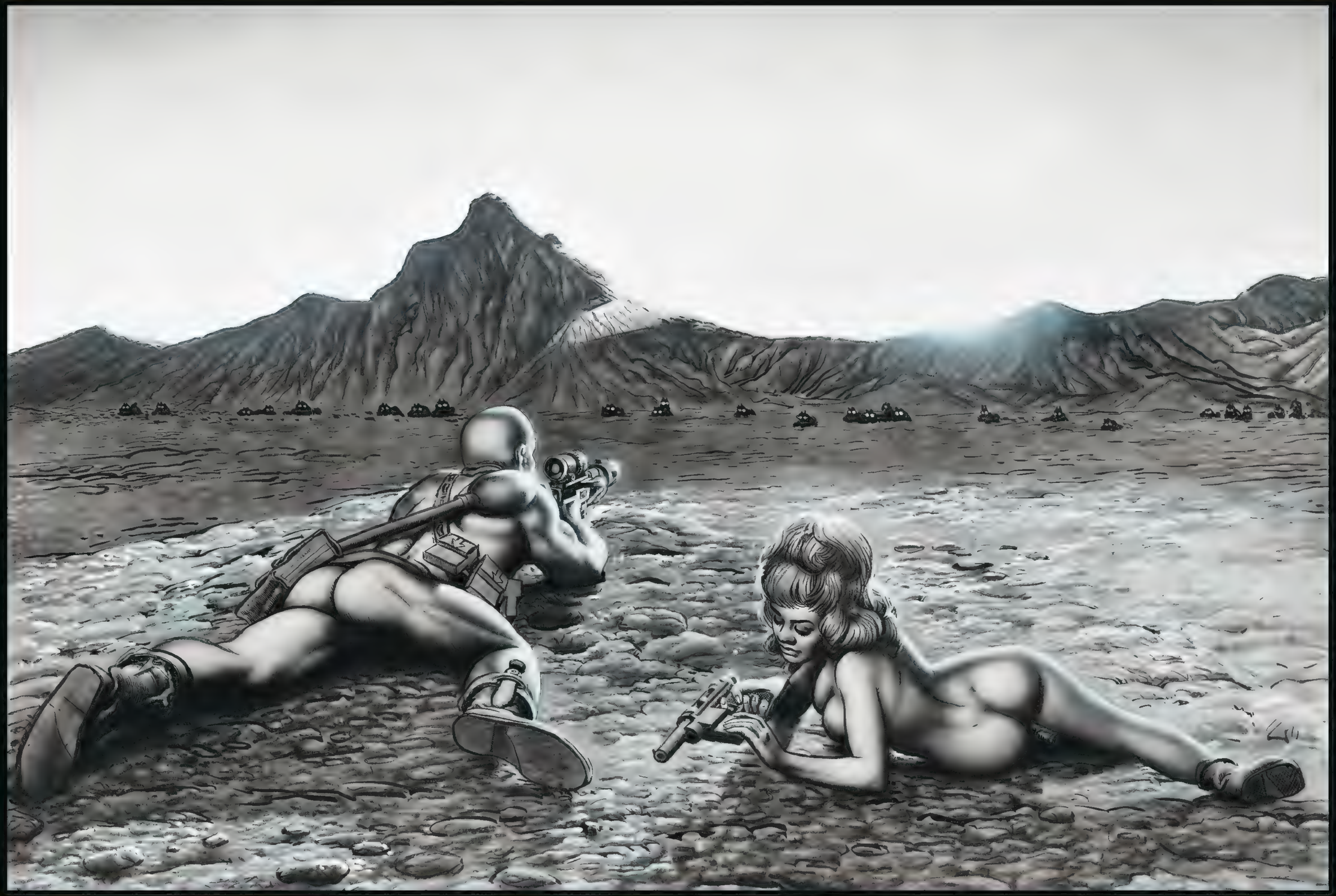
DEN GALLERY



Top: Corben's Business Card (1960s)

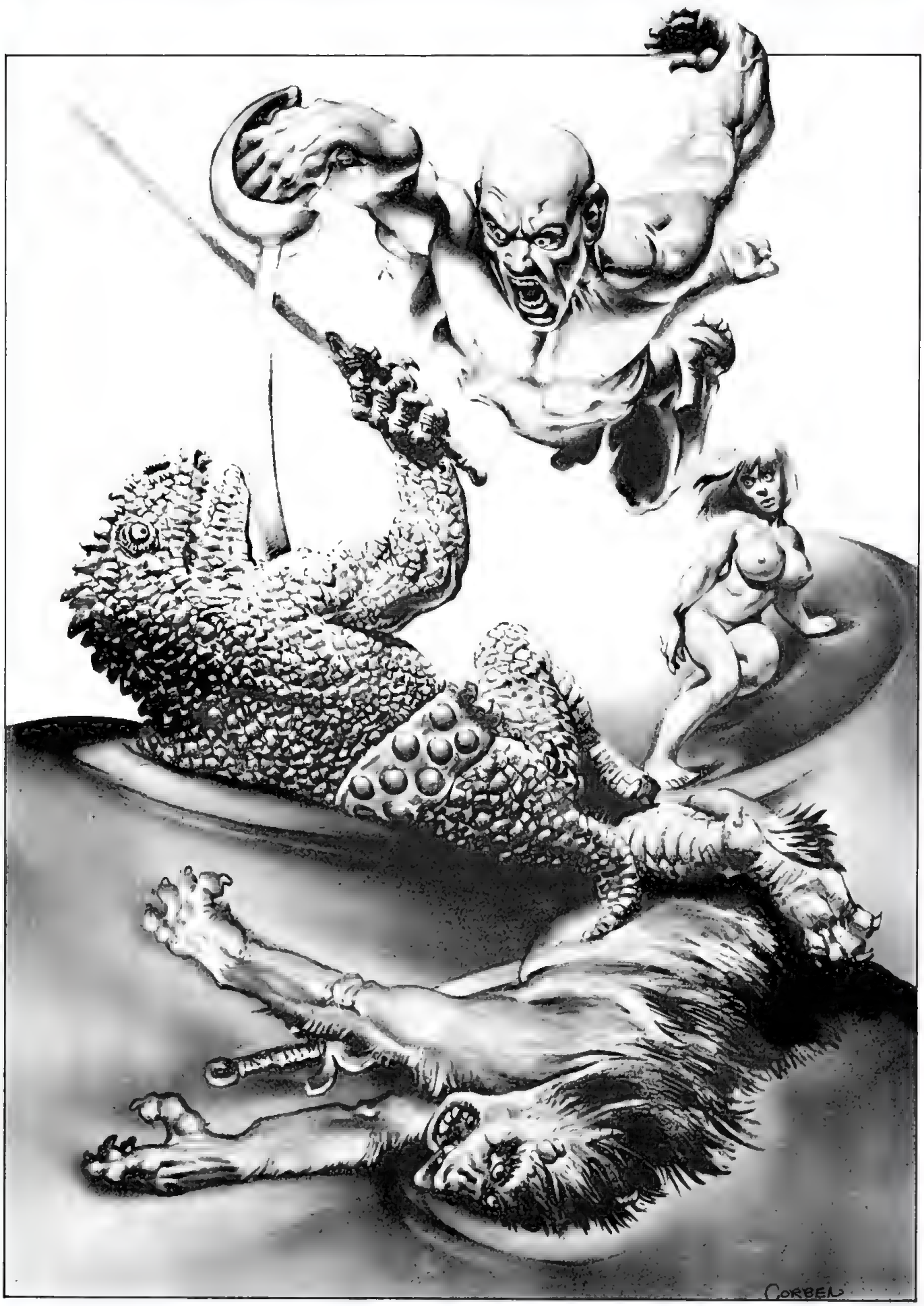
Bottom: Den Kicks (1970)

Neverwhere Castle (1968)



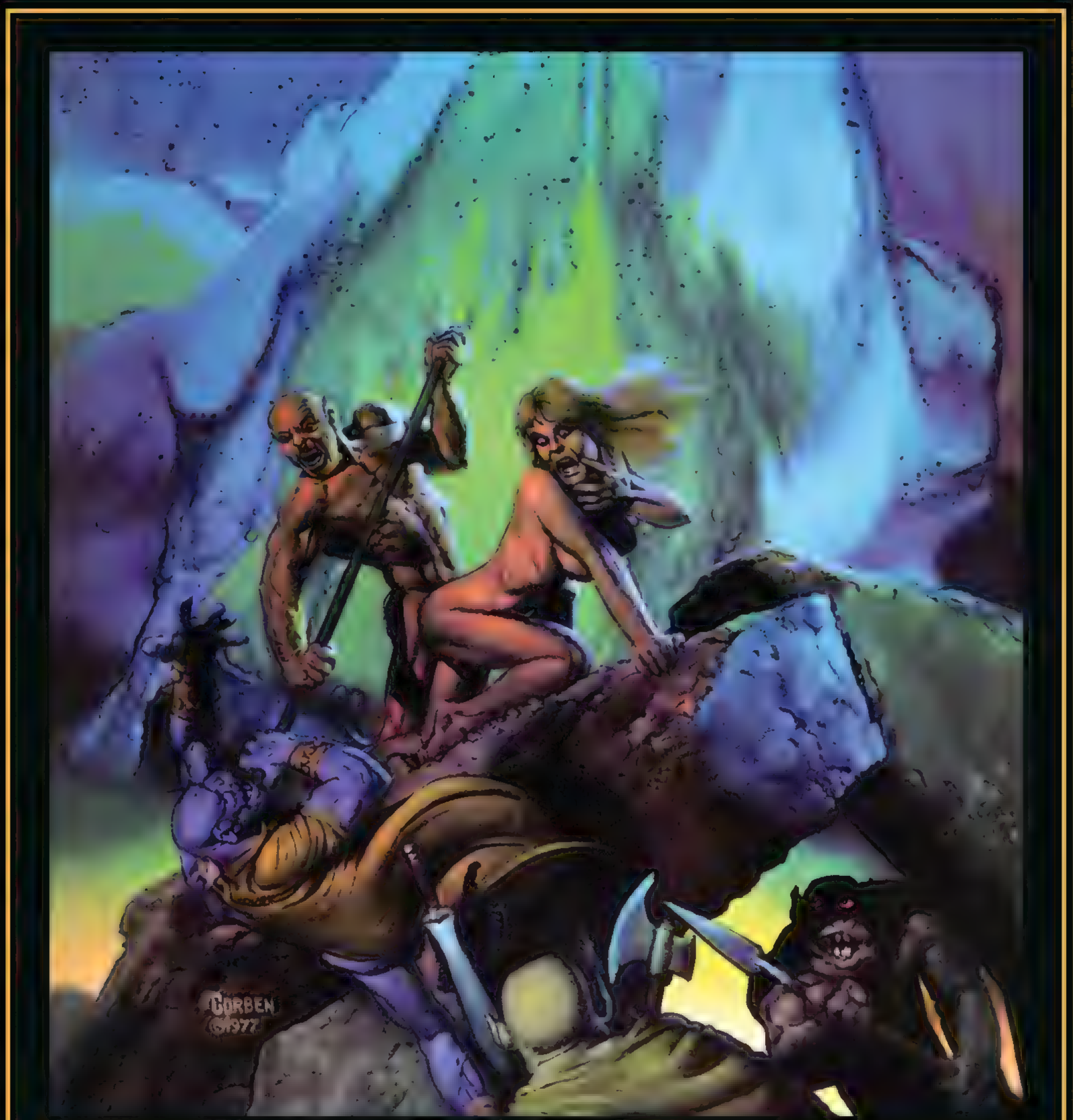
Original Art for Fantagor Poster (1968)

Cover of *Grim Wit* #2, First Appearance in Print of Den (1972)

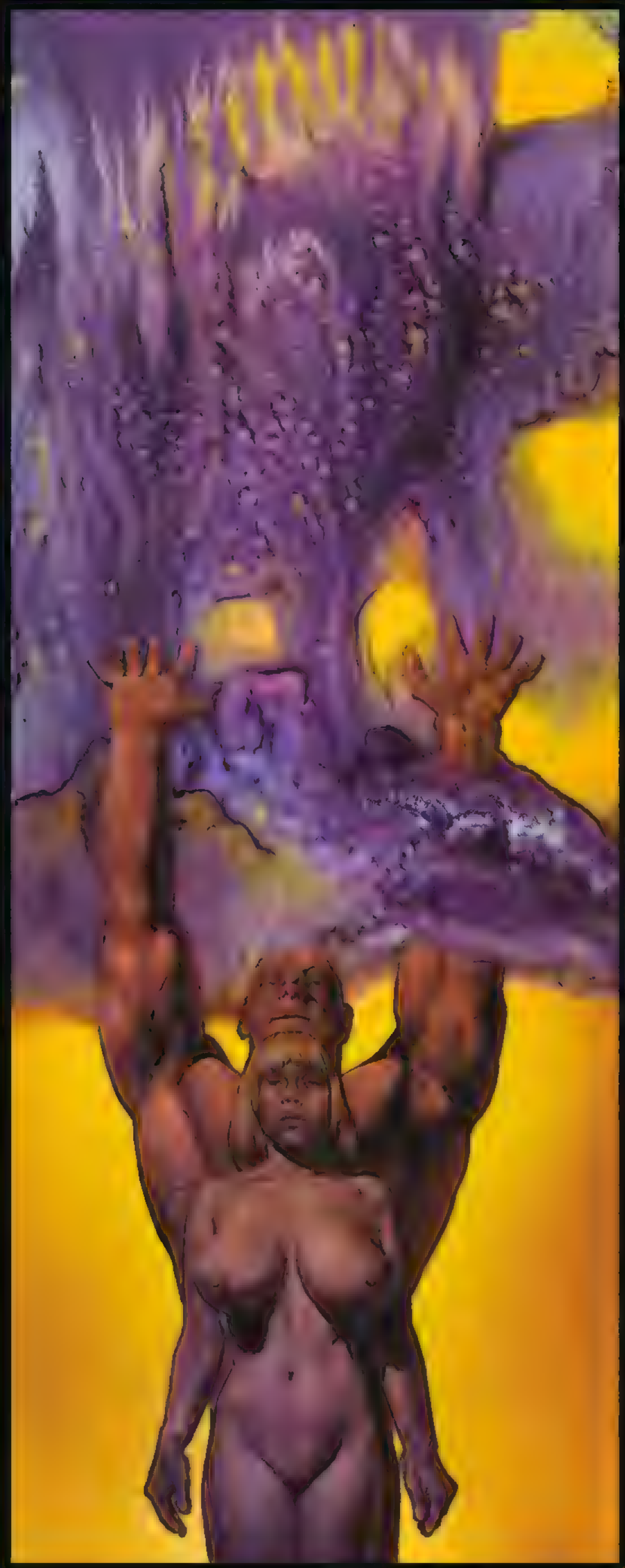


Graphic Gallery #9 (1976)

Cover for *Graphic Gallery* #9 (1976)



Cover of the First Ariel Books/Ballantine Books Edition (1977)

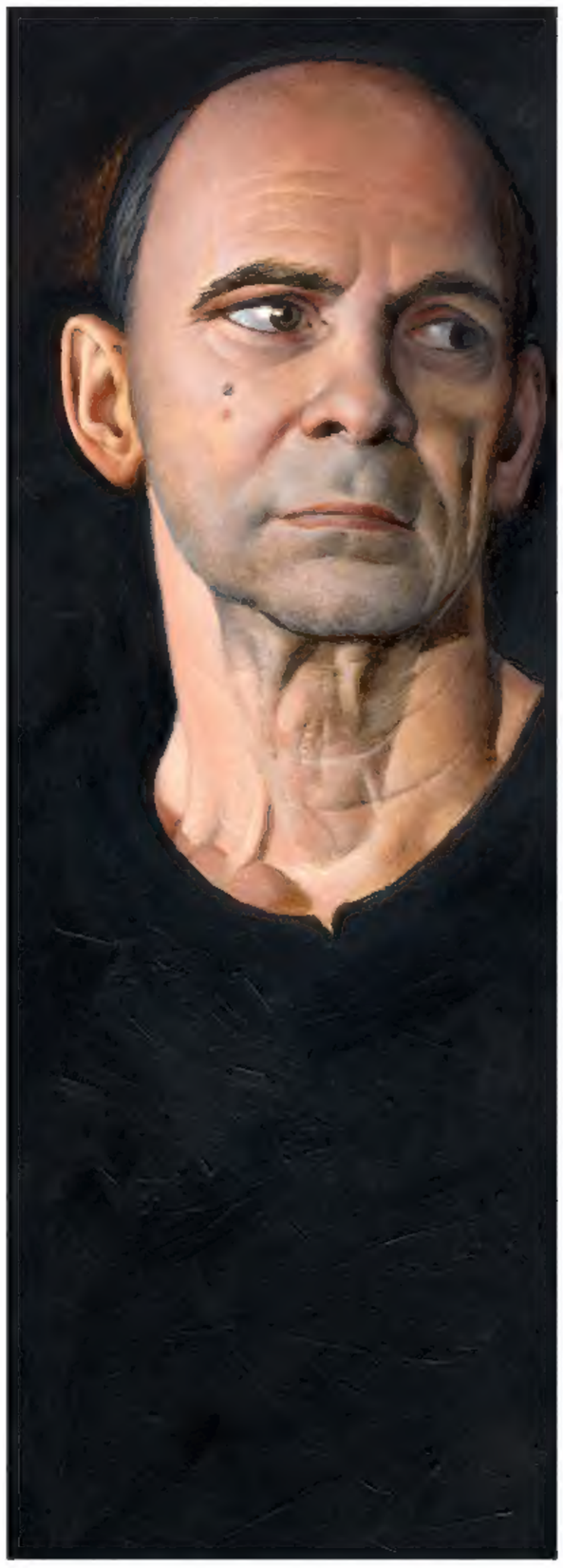


Frontispiece of the First Ariel Books / Ballantine Books Edition (1977)

Back Cover Art of First European Edition (1978)

Richard Corben was born in Missouri and grew up in Sunflower, Kansas, a community that worked for the Sunflower Ordnance Works, an army plant that manufactured bombs in World War II.

Corben drew comics all of his life. An early effort was a series of comics about the adventures of TRAIL, the family dog. Later, he created imitations of Tarzan and Brothers of the Spear. He also showed a keen interest in animation by turning many pads of paper into animated flipbooks.



While attending the Kansas City Art Institute, he concentrated on basic drawing and painting, developing skills that would become vital in creating his chosen realistic style. At that time, his college offered no courses for animation, but by using his father's 8 mm movie camera, Corben nevertheless produced a 5-minute animated film highlighting the labors of Heracles as his senior project.

After graduation, Corben wanted to go to New York to launch a career in comics or animation, but he was shy and timid, and put off such a drastic move. After working in construction for his father for a while, he found a local job as an artist/animator/cameraman in a Kansas City industrial film company. During this time, despite his shyness, he found a girl to marry him.

After nearly ten years at the film company, Corben felt frustrated that he really hadn't given his art career a chance. He started drawing so-called "underground" comix and fanzines at night after working a full-time job during the day. About this same time, Warren Publishing Company began a series of black-and-white horror comics, CREEPY, EERIE, and VAMPIRELLA. This was a perfect match for Corben's interests, and he drew several stories for CREEPY on speculation. Unfortunately, none of these were accepted. But the "wannabe" comic book artist persisted and even met James Warren at a science fiction convention. Finally, Warren and his editor, Bill Dubay, relented and started sending Corben scripts to draw. At last, a foothold was established in his comic career. Even with the responsibilities of a wife, a daughter and a mortgage, the young artist now felt confident enough to quit his full-time job at the industrial film company and devote all his time to drawing.

The underground comix surge spread to Europe, and requests to reprint Corben underground features began to appear. His fantasy character, DEN, was created for the American underground comic, GRIM WIT; DEN was next printed in the French METAL HURLANT, and then printed in the American HEAVY METAL. During this era, Richard and Dona started FANTAGOR PRESS, a publishing company featuring Richard's comics. Unfortunately, the business wasn't enough to support them. Next, Corben began drawing for American comics—D.C., MARVEL, DARK HORSE, and others.

Corben believed that maintaining drawing skills required constant practice. He regularly attended life drawing classes all throughout his career. He found the activity both an ongoing challenge and a source of pleasure.

His love and interest in animation continued throughout his lifetime and motivated him to create digitally animated movies he shared on his web site and Facebook page.

Richard was married for 56 years to Dona, and is the father of watercolor artist and comic book colorist, Beth. His life and love was devoted to his family and his art. He was a humble man and an extremely kind, good man.

Richard Corben died December 2, 2020.

RICHARD CORBEN'S MASTERPIECE AT LAST BACK IN PRINT AFTER DECADES!

Well known for his legendary fantasy underground masterpieces published by Fantagor Press as well as *Heavy Metal*, Richard Corben's work has been recognized internationally having been awarded one of the most prestigious recognitions in comics literature, the Grand Prix at Angoulême, as well having been inducted into the Will Eisner Award Hall of Fame.

Thrust into a bizarre fantasy world called Neverwhere, the muscular adventurer Den goes on an exotic adventure through ancient ruins meeting an evil queen, her sacrificial doppelganger, bizarre lizard men, giant insects, and more strange and dangerous madness in this legendary saga brimming with horror, magic, and violence.

Following the release of *Murky World*, this is the next book in a series of deluxe graphic novels from renowned creator Richard Corben's library to be published by Dark Horse Comics. This special edition collects the first volume of the long out-of-print *Den*, and also features bonus material, all art pages restored from original plates by long-time Corben collaborator José Villarrubia, who also contributes with an essay, new lettering by Nate Piekos of Blambot, and an introduction by Patton Oswalt, all presented in a gorgeous hardcover with a dust jacket.

"This is the world of Corben, the progrock strip club at the far end of your mind."
–PATTON OSWALT

DARK HORSE BOOKS

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"THIS FAN... THIS MONSTER!"